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# HUNT THE SLIPPER



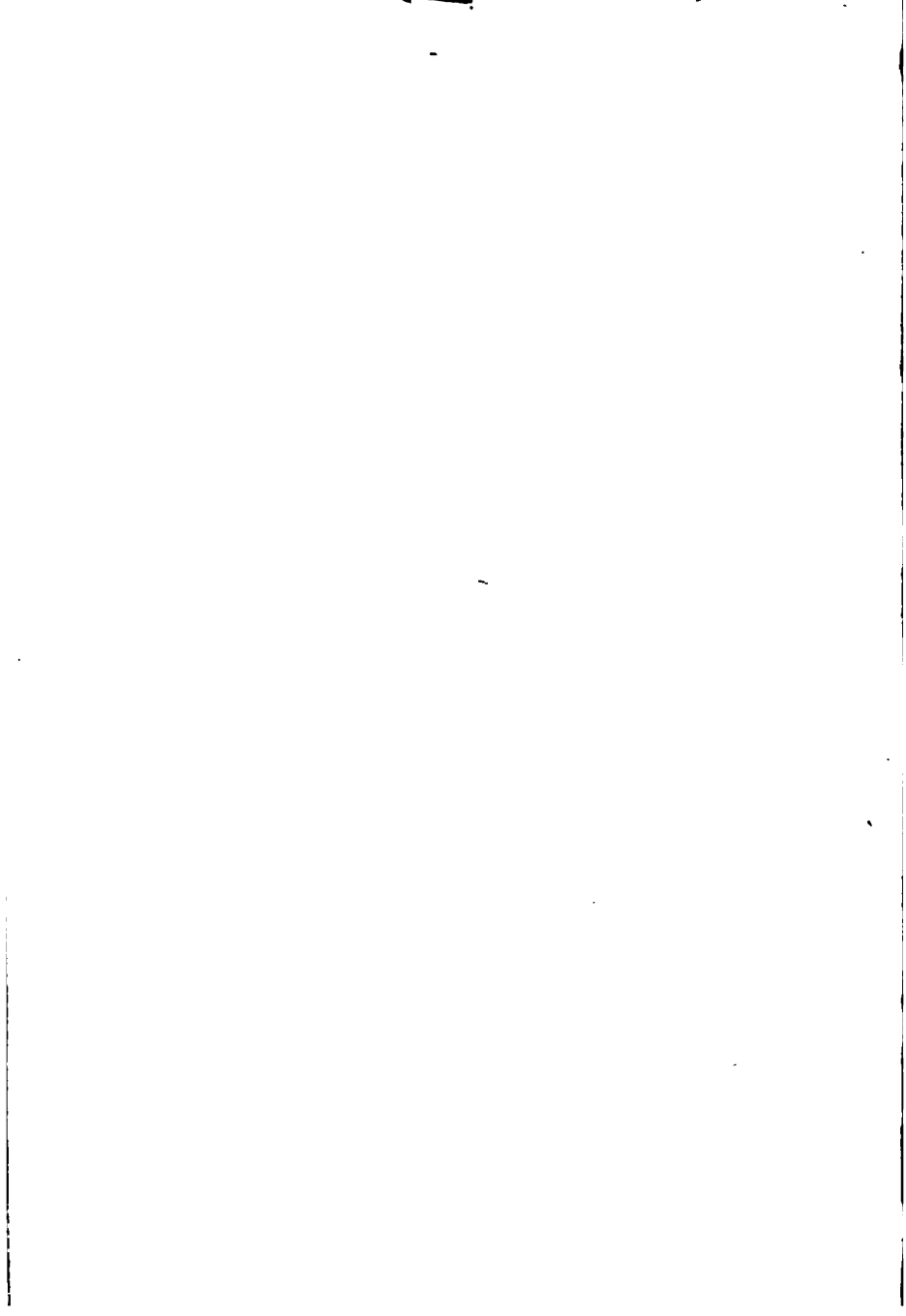
OLIVER MADDOX HUEFFER



Silvia



# **HUNT THE SLIPPER**



# HUNT THE SLIPPER

A NOVEL

BY

OLIVER MADOX HUEFFER

(JANE WARDLE)

AUTHOR OF "THE ARTISTIC TEMPERAMENT," "THE LORD OF LATIMER STREET,"  
"WHERE TRUTH LIES," "MARJORY PIGEON," ETC., ETC.

*"Il y a des honnêtes gens partout"*

NEW YORK

JOHN LANE COMPANY

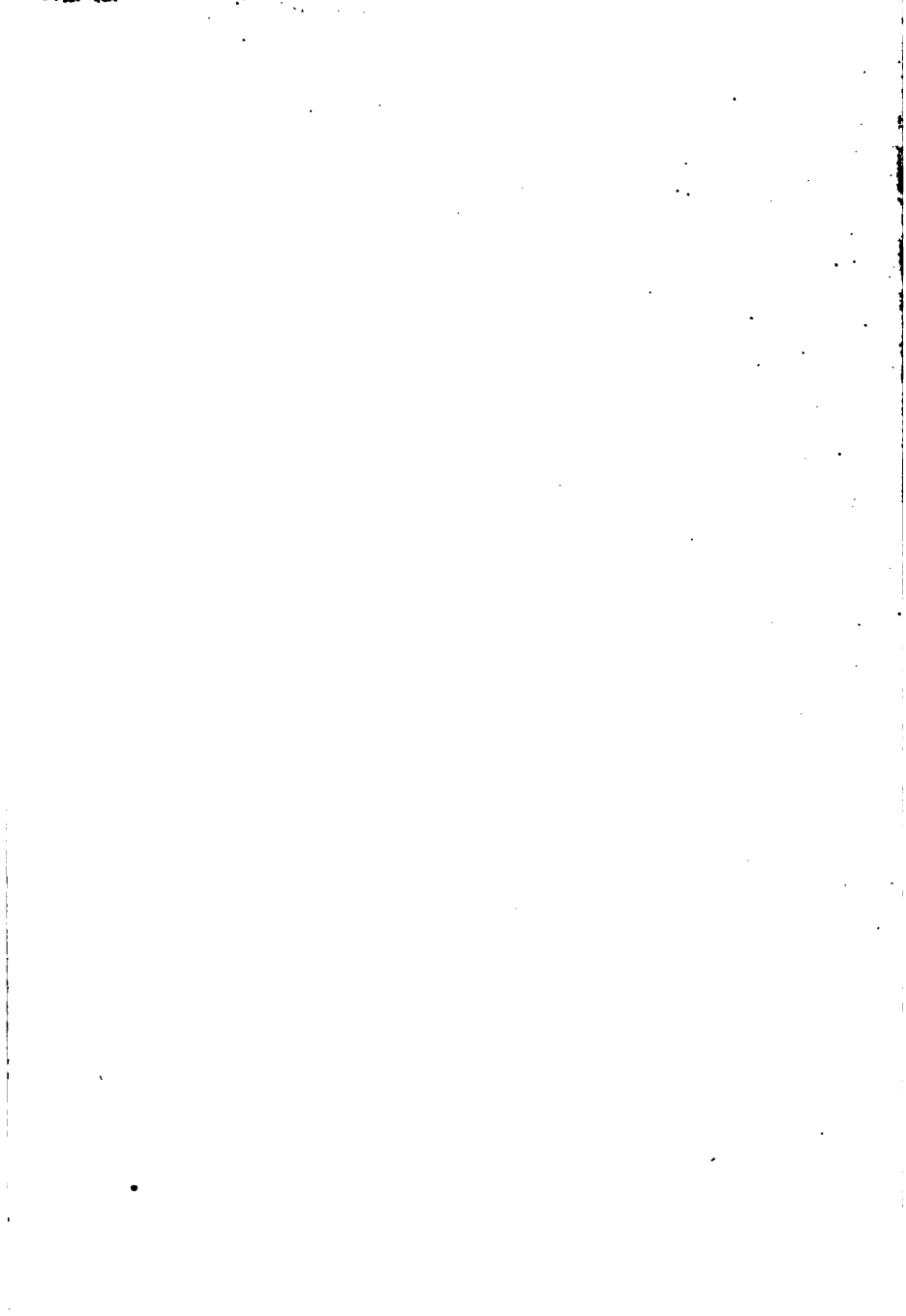
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PR6015  
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*Printed in Great Britain*

**TO**  
**GEORGE GRANTHAM BAIN**



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# HUNT THE SLIPPER

## PART I

### SIR EDWARD FANHOPE'S NARRATIVE

#### CHAPTER I

UNLESS I am wrong in my facts, which I do not for a moment believe, the office of Justice of the Peace is among the oldest and most honourable in our country, dating certainly from the year of our Lord 1264, when as Mr. Grist, our excellent Clerk, informs me, the name "custos pacis" first appears in English records. Under slightly different designations I understand that we have existed almost from the dawn of history. On the other hand, County Councils, stipendiaries and the like are purely modern and untried. I mention this, not to disprove the old sneer against "Justices' justice," which is, I fear, frequently justified in some parts of the country, but as indicating that even in these days we have the right to expect common politeness from members of the County Councils, however eminent in their own opinion.

I have and have always had a high regard for Richard Witham. We were at school together

some seventy years ago when, as he has long since forgotten, I suppose, he was my fag at Winton—and he certainly did not set up his own opinion against mine in those days. I have no doubt that, as the senior member of the most respectable firm of solicitors in Ashurst, he knows the law well enough. I am always ready to consider any point submitted by him, even when it goes against the opinion of Mr. Grist, who is at least as well qualified as himself. But when, in open court, he flatly accuses me of prejudice and of ignoring the law of evidence, there I draw the line.

I freely admit that I dislike motor-cars and their drivers. They cause innumerable accidents to life and limb; they cut up our roads until the county rates become unbearable; they deteriorate our breed of horses, as we shall discover to our cost in the next war; their hooting and their stench devastate the country-side. All this is beyond argument. Yet I acknowledge them a necessary evil, and admit that it is too late to hope for their abolition. And I would ask any unprejudiced person whether the following badgering of a perfectly respectable witness is in accordance with the principles of English justice and fair play.

Richard Witham who, being seventy-five years of age, is certainly old enough to know better, was himself the defendant, on a charge of exceeding the speed limit on the main London road, between Ashurst and Folkstone. The chief witness against him was Police Constable Lyman, formerly Lance-Corporal in the old 145th Regiment. He is a zealous and efficient officer and obtained his present post upon my own strong recommendation. I have

been told, by ignorant busybodies, though I do not for a moment believe it, that he has, or had, a weakness for strong drink. Whether or no, he has certainly never been seen intoxicated when on duty, or our worthy Superintendent would have had something to say about it, you may be sure. Yet these are the questions that the defendant had the effrontery to put to him, in my presence as chairman.

"You have said that I came suddenly round the corner at forty-eight miles an hour without sounding my horn, and that only your presence of mind in clambering up the bank by the roadside saved you from being run down. Are you prepared to swear to that?"

"Haven't I sworn to it already?"

"Very well. That is what I wish to make clear. Are you equally ready to swear that you were sober at the time?"

"I don't think you ought——"

"The facts are in question, not what you think. You are on oath, remember."

"I was not on duty then, sir."

"Answer my question. Were you, or were you not strictly sober?"

Lyman looked across to me, for guidance perhaps, but Mr. Grist was not at the moment in court, and, lest I might lay us both open to some legal innuendo, I pretended to be consulting my notes.

"Answer my question," roared Witham again.

"Stands to reason I was," answered Lyman, very shrewdly, I thought. "I had been over at Mallinge visiting my sister Mary, what keeps the 'Crown' there. Think she would let me leave her house



not sober and perhaps risk her licence? Not likely."

"How much had you to drink there?"

I managed to catch Mr. Grist's eye as he returned to court, but he shook his head slightly as a sign that I could not properly interfere.

"I hadn't had but two half-pints."

"Nothing else? You are on oath."

"I may have given her my opinion on a new brand of Scotch she was thinking of trying."

"Exactly. And on your way home, how many licensed houses did you pass?"

"How should I know, sir?"

"As a police officer it is your duty to know. But perhaps I can refresh your memory. There is the 'Cock' at Harbinge. Did you call in there on your way home?"

"I may have."

"What did you drink there?"

"I don't remember."

"Were you so far gone already?"

"I wasn't. How could I be far gone? I hadn't touched nothing, to speak of."

"Then there is the 'Plough,' half a mile this side of Harbinge. Did you look in there?"

"I may have."

"And the 'Chequers' at West Harbinge?"

"No, I didn't. I don't like the beer they serve."

"Quite sure? It was a chilly evening, remember, and there is not another licensed house for nearly another mile."

"I ain't a Radical."

"Answer my question. Did you or did you not call there?"

"And if I did, where was the harm in it?"

"I am not suggesting that there was any harm in it. Now—another point. At the time you saw me, how many cars were coming round that corner?"

"How many?"

"Will you swear—you are on oath, remember—that there was only one?"

"I—I have said what I have to say already."

"You will swear—in spite of anything that other witnesses may swear to the contrary—that there was only the one car in sight?"

"I—I—can't remember that there wasn't——"

"You see, your worships."

And so on, until the wretched witness did not know whether he was standing on his heels or his head. I am not, thank Heaven, a lawyer, but it was clear enough that such badgering of a respectable man, whose official position, let alone his record as a soldier, should have protected him, was nothing less than an affront to the Court. When the opportunity came, I made short work of Mr. Witham's cross-examination. My judgment, in which my colleagues—Sir Claude Hogben and Mr. Arthur Cronk—heartily agreed, was that the defendant should be fined ten pounds, and five guineas costs, his licence to be endorsed accordingly. In delivering it I took pleasure in pointing out that only his age, his position as a member of the Kent County Council, and the fact that nothing else was known against him, prevented me from imposing a term of imprisonment.

He was never the sort of man to be grateful for such lenity. Almost before I had finished my remarks he gave notice of appeal to Quarter

Sessions, on the grounds, as far as I can remember, of prejudice and the admission of inadmissible evidence. His manner was so offensive that I seriously considered whether I ought not to commit him for contempt. This occurred, let me add, upon Tuesday, September 19th last, the day before my birthday, and was fully reported in the local Press of the following morning.

The business before the Court disposed of, I usually take tea at the 'Bull' before driving back to Squirrels. I had finished my tea and toast—they make excellent toast at the 'Bull,' before a real fire instead of the horrid gas-stoves now in fashion, which heat the bread to a hateful equality. I had paid the bill and already ordered round the dog-cart, when who should enter the coffee room but Dick Witham himself? I was not alone; Mr. Grist was my guest for the occasion and several others were seated at neighbouring tables. As it happened, we had been discussing the events of the day, in which, as you may suppose, Witham's name figured with some prominence.

There was a sudden silence as he came in. I hoped that the earnestness with which I stirred my empty cup might warn him of my feelings, but, without a with-your-leave or by-your-leave he came straight across to my table and told me, ignoring Mr. Grist, that he had a word for my private ear. Witham certainly has manner; Mr. Grist, a much younger man, quite lost his presence of mind and made off, murmuring something about an engagement he had forgotten. Those at the neighbouring tables hitched their chairs forward as though to lose nothing of what passed.

I received my unwelcome visitor with all due reserve. "What do want with me?" I asked him.

He sat down beside me and laid his hand on mine, so that I could not withdraw it without seeming ungracious. "My dear old Ned," he said, "I have something—something important to say to you."

I could not very well ignore an appeal so direct. I supposed of course that he wished me to remit part of his fine.

"I am sorry," I told him. "I can do nothing. I have given my decision, and there is nothing more to be said."

"Ned," he persisted obstinately, "I want you to draw your mind away from our little local squabbles about nothing. I have——"

"I don't know what you mean," I told him, very truly. "Because it has been my painful duty——"

"We know all about that," he interrupted, irritably. "You were entirely in the wrong, of course, both in law and justice. Trust your Clerk for that. But—oh, my dear Ned—to-morrow is your birthday."

"I am at least as well aware of it as you are," I reminded him. "If you are appealing for leniency on that account, please to remember that my private affairs and those of the State have no——"

"You infernal old idiot," he burst out, as though we were still at school together, but he checked himself at once. "Listen to me," he went on, more soberly. "What I have to say to you has nothing whatever to do with all that. I have something to tell you—something to show you—that will please you. I came here for that purpose, but——" He

glanced round at the attentive tables and raised his voice a little. "It is impossible to talk in this long-eared menagerie. Let me know where and when I can see you to-morrow. It will be better than to-day. It will be the very best day of all."

Looking at his face attentively I could read that he was deeply in earnest and that he was regarding me with something very like affection, the less to be expected that our estrangement has now endured for something like twenty years. "If you have really something that you wish to tell me," I said, "something not connected with the administration of justice, I—I shall be at home all day to-morrow, as you probably know. The—my friends are in the habit of arriving at Squirrels at eleven in the forenoon——"

"As I am not a friend, Ned," he said, smiling rather queerly, "but only your oldest acquaintance, I will be with you at ten."

"I shall be very glad to see you." I fear my manner may have seemed stiff, contrasted with his, but I could not altogether forget his attitude towards my poor son at the time he most needed a friend and a defender. For a moment it occurred to me that he might wish to re-open that most painful subject, but that I could not seriously consider, after the discord it had already wrought between us. Perhaps he realised the trend of my thoughts.

"It is nothing at all that need make you lose a night's rest—or an hour's," he assured me. "Quite the contrary. But—your cart is at the door—and I must get across to the office."

And with that I had to rest content for the time.

## CHAPTER II

UPON Wednesday, September 20th, I celebrated at once my seventy-seventh birthday and the fifty-sixth anniversary of that battle on the Alma heights in which my flatterers are kind enough to say that I first distinguished myself. Following a long-established custom, a few intimate friends honoured the occasion by dining with me at my house near Ashurst in Kent. By a fortunate coincidence—which is perhaps not altogether a coincidence either—some half-dozen of us have settled down to end our lives within a ten-mile radius, and one of our conventions is religiously to observe the anniversaries of our respective births.

I passed a disturbed night, having wasted some precious hours in vain imaginings of the news Dick Witham might have in store for me. I rose, however, at eight, that I might have time, between breakfast and his coming, to see that all was in order for firing the salute with which we are accustomed to welcome the day of victory. I might, save for inclination, have spared myself the trouble; Handasyde, my housekeeper, and Skase, the gardener, who have taken the ceremony under their especial care, are at least as keen about it as am I. I found, then, everything in readiness. The two brass signal guns which form our battery, and which

I really believe Handasyde keeps under her bed during the rest of the year, for I never see them at any other time, were established on the croquet-lawn, flanking the flagstaff. They were so brightly burnished that, in the morning sunlight, it was quite dazzling to look at them. The charges were neatly arranged beside them; the Jack was already triced to the halyards, ready for hoisting. Handasyde was upon her knees beside one of the guns, giving it a final polish with a piece of chamois leather. Skase, leaning against the flagstaff with his hands in his pockets, seemed divided between telling her where to rub and watching Trix—my old bull-bitch, a present from Admiral Powys from his famous kennels on the "Perseus"—who was feebly attempting to scrape off the bunting with which he had adorned her neck.

As I came out through the French window, both stood to attention and saluted, Handasyde, although I have explained to her a thousand times, I suppose, that, when bareheaded, to stand at attention is all that is required of her. I believe myself she is confused by her recollection that women keep their heads covered in church. I cannot explain it otherwise.

I was returning, a little later, from the paddock, where they were setting up the marquee for the school-children's treat later in the day, when the honk-honking of his infernal horn warned me that Witham had arrived. I was just in time to see him charge through the gate at full speed, his white hair flying all about him, for he seemed to have lost his hat, and his overcoat as grey with dust as was the flat-headed, squat-legged monstrosity he was driving.

His greetings were in character with his appearance. "Fifteen seconds under the five minutes," he cried, before he got out, staring at a clock set in his dash-board. "Not bad that. Call up your myrmidons, your Worship."

I was too glad to see him to find any fault just then with his efforts to break his neck. I welcomed him with a warmth that surprised myself—never pausing to reflect that the stench from his Juggernaut would blight every flower in the garden before I got rid of him again—and led the way into the library.

It was good to see his sixteen stone standing in the middle of the carpet again, pulling at his over-tight gloves just as he used to thirty years ago. The same idea must have struck him, for he peered round the walls one after another, as if in search of changes. "Might have been yesterday," he muttered ; and then, craning towards the inner wall, "Hallo, Ned, you've changed the places of those two pictures." As I had, fifteen years or so before. "Now, how much time can you give me?"

He was exactly punctual, as usual. We had a full hour before I need expect my other friends.

"That's ample." He settled back into the same armchair he had occupied on his last visit—I remembered it very well, as perhaps did he. He had grown stouter in the interim, so that it was scarcely large enough for him. He perched his pince-nez on the very tip of his nose, as if he were going to juggle with them, fumbled in his breast pocket and produced a bundle of papers, neatly secured with red tape.

"You are sure it has nothing to do with—with



public matters?" I asked him. I felt I could not allow myself to be drawn into a quarrel with him on such a day.

"Nothing at all," he said absently, arranging his papers on his knee. "It's about poor Dicky."

I rose at once. "Then—I am sorry—but I must decline to listen to you. We have said all that is to be said on that subject."

I was frankly amazed at his audacity. Upon the last occasion that my son was mentioned between us I spoke my mind very freely. Although the poor boy was his godson and namesake, whenever his high spirits led him into some boyish scrape—as was only too often the case—Witham's attitude was always rather that of a stepfather ready to think the worst and to attribute the worst motives. When the poor lad finally disappeared, I gratefully acknowledged that he put himself to considerable trouble to avoid any open scandal, but at the same time his attitude was so unsympathetic as to arouse my natural resentment. From that day our old intimacy grew less, though we were still outwardly on friendly terms. The news of my son's unhappy death put an end to all intercourse between us. It actually reached me through Witham, or his firm, for he still transacted my small legal business. He did not, however, trouble to come himself with the news, but sent his son Edward, my godson, to break it to me. It was only too clear that the poor lad had been murdered, most foully. Witham and his precious son made it perfectly clear that they believed the abominable lie, invented by some scoundrel of a newspaper reporter, I suppose, that he met his death after a brawl in a low drinking-

hell, having quarrelled with some cut-throat over a woman. After that, as you may suppose, all pretence of friendship was at an end between us, and for the last ten years I do not suppose we exchanged as many words, except upon public matters. I sometimes wondered whether his behaviour was due to jealousy. His own three sons were well enough, in their dull, plodding way ; they are now partners in his business, and, I hear, do him sufficient credit. But in brains and looks and manners they were always the sheerest clods beside my Richard.

With these things in my memory you may understand how I felt when he calmly reopened the old wound—and how emphatically I repelled him. He paid not the least attention, merely resettled his pince-nez and went on talking as though I were no more than an ill-tempered child.

“We have always believed——”

“I absolutely refuse, I tell you——”

“That poor Dicky died at Portland, Oregon, in May, 1886. It seems we were mistaken.”

I was already half-way to the door, to call for help in ejecting him, for he was too heavy for me to tackle alone. I stopped at his words and sat down heavily on the nearest chair.

“He did not in fact die until three years later,” went on Witham in his calm, matter-of-fact voice. “When he died, it was—as a hero.” He looked round towards where I sat behind him. “That is what I came to tell you to-day, old friend.”

It was as though he were hypnotising me. I rose, quite without any volition of my own, drew a chair towards him and fell upon it. “A hero? Did you say a hero? My son, you mean?”

Dear old Dick reached out a hand and patted my knee, the only bit of me he could reach. "The earlier report was altogether a mistake. The body was not—the man we feared it to be, although it wore clothes marked with his name and had his watch in its pocket. It was another man, a Norwegian sailor. Dick was what they call there 'shanghaid.' He was drugged in a sailor's boarding-house and while insensible was carried on board a ship. I understand that such a way of recruiting seamen is not uncommon in that part of the world."

I knew, and gratefully, that he was purposely talking in his driest tones to help me to recover myself. But it was no good—the sudden relief from a nightmare that had haunted me for years was too much for me. I had to beg him stop for a little, while I sat quiet. He held one of my hands as if I had been a baby. It was ridiculous of course, but it was very comforting. I needed something solid and firm to cling to while all my world was shivering about me.

"You can go on," I whispered, after, I suppose, five minutes. "I shall be all right now." But I still clung to his hand, and an absurd couple we must have looked had there been any to see us.

"Dicky gave his life for a wretched Chinese servant." He snorted contemptuously, though whether at Dicky or the Chinaman I do not know. "We have good authority for holding that the truest kind of heroism."

I believe he assumed the gruffest of voices to hide the sound of tears in it.

"You have brought me a birthday present indeed,"

I told him as the most comfortable thing for him that I could think of.

"I may as well tell you the whole story." He picked up the bundle of papers again, as a sign that he eschewed further sentimentality. "The name of the vessel was the *Mary G. M'Guire*, an American trading-brig, bound for Sydney, New South Wales. Either before or after reaching that port, more probably before, she called at Port Moresby, in New Guinea, where Dicky left her, took French leave, I suppose. He stayed there for some time, for what purpose we can only conjecture. He there met a Miss Heinsius, the daughter of a Moravian missionary. That was in the early days of 1887. In March of that year he married her."

He cocked his eye at me over his papers, missing his pince-nez by a good two inches. I disgraced myself by laughing outright. "Married?" I cried. "That boy married? Why—it's ridiculous."

Before either of us could say another word a most abominable hammering came from the outer hall and a moment later the door burst open and Major Padstow charged through it as though shot from a mortar. He was purple in the face and so breathless that he could scarcely gasp out something about the compliments of the day and being the first to bring them to me.

Dick Witham started to his feet, clutching at his precious papers. I really believe the man was frightened. Being better acquainted with the intruder, I felt only angry. Before I could find appropriate words Padstow recovered his breath and thrust a small wooden keg into my arms. It

was about the size of a child's drum and thickly coated with mud, so that it ruined my white waistcoat for good and all. "Musn't mind the mud," he gasped. "Dropped it, taking the bullfinch by Church corpse."

I sometimes think that Charley Padstow's boisterousness would be annoying if it were not pathetic, just as his determined youthfulness—in a man just eight years my junior, mark you—would be pathetic if it were not ridiculous. Young or old, there he stood, slashing at his gaiters with his riding-crop and rolling his eyes about, until they happened to rest upon Dick Witham. And then I really thought they would spring out of his head.

"Witham," he cried. "In this house! Perjury Witham—or the devil in his shape!"

## CHAPTER III

I HAVE never known Charles Padstow to have less than three lawsuits on hand, and twice he has been before me on charges of aggravated assault. Dick Witham has frequently acted for his opponents, usually with success, whence, of course, the insulting epithet flung at his head beneath my roof. I had sufficient cause already to be annoyed; this put the copestone to my anger. I dropped the keg upon the nearest chair, whence it rolled to the floor, carrying devastation with it—and slipped my arm through Dick's, muddying it handsomely. "Mr. Witham," I said, "is my oldest friend. And he has brought me this morning the best gift that ever man had."

The major's eyes roved towards his keg, which, after stencilling a pathway across the white skin hearthrug, brought up against the fender.

"And anyone who insults him in my house," I added, to command his attention, "insults me."

"Dick Witham—you are a trump," he burst out, as if he had come on purpose to say so and could no longer restrain himself. "The last trump in the hand. Get out, you beast. Get out, I tell you."

His last words, I was relieved to find, for there was no change in his voice, were addressed, not to

Dick, but to old Trix. Having traitorously mumbled the Union Jack round her neck into a moist, squishy pulp, she had gone to sleep in her favourite position before the fireplace, her head lolling across the sharp curb of the fender and one paw dangling limp in the air above her. The coming of the keg had disturbed her and she was smelling at it distrustfully.

The major retrieved it, not without a twinge, as I could see by the way he set his hand to his side, and offered it for my reacceptance.

"The mixture as before," he said, while I was disposing of it on the edge of my desk. "Caviare for the general."

He laughed very heartily at the time-honoured jest and I did my best to emulate him, though it was far from being the first time I had heard it. I thanked him warmly too, for although his gift enshrines a perennial apprehension, it is very kindly meant. Every year he procures, at considerable expense, I fear, a keg of caviare from some firm in Odessa and presents it to me on my birthday. As a matter of fact I dislike the stuff intensely, though I cannot very well say so. For many years, being under his very eye, I was forced to eat some of it at my birthday dinner, which thus became a penance. Poor Trix—who always sits beside my chair at meals, though she is far too well-bred to beg—in her heart dislikes the stuff as intensely as I do. By patient training however, aided, I think, by the great love the poor beast bears me, I have brought her to accept it from my hand, though she flies from it whimpering when offered in any other way, and thus, at the cost of some cruelty, I fear, I can now dispose of enough at a sitting to satisfy the donor.

Any further confidences were clearly at an end, but I was very loath to part with Dick Witham, as I think he realised and appreciated. Although business called him away for the time, he promised in the end to return and take dinner with me, bringing with him, if possible, his wife and his eldest son, my godson. Thus, without any protestations, we both were happy to feel assured that our long estrangement was at an end.

Scarcely had his devil-machine slipped through the gate, at a speed that made me dizzy, when Franklyn Bates arrived in the shabby chaise which it pleases him to drive and which is as significant a contrast to Charley's fat cob as to Dick's motor or Mrs. Hathorn's—widow of my comrade, Colonel William Hathorn, of the old 87th—neat little brougham, which followed him a minute or two later.

Of all my friends Franklyn Bates requires the most delicate management. Although he is one of the most prosperous stock-raisers in our part of Kent, he was at one time a gentlemen ranker in my old regiment and still insists upon his inferior rank with unnecessary punctilio. Scarcely had his feet touched the ground than he asked my permission, as senior officer present, to fall out, in order to pay his respects to Handasyde, whose husband was formerly his "towny," as he loves to put it; he was, I think, instrumental in bringing them together in the first place.

With Mrs. Hathorn was Frank Cottery, for whom she had called on the way. Father Greatrex walked in shortly afterwards, and our little party was complete. I was of course delighted to see



each and all of them, but I really think my warmest greeting went out to old Lord Cottery, who, being stone deaf, perhaps heeded them least. He formerly held an important post in the Admiralty, and in the exercise of his duty ventured too close to one of the big guns at, I think, Dover, which, he maintained, could not be discharged without bursting. In this he proved right enough, for at the very first discharge it burst both his ear-drums. We are all devoted to him, perhaps because he makes us feel so young—for he is really incredibly old. Mrs. Hathorn will have it that he is twenty years older than his own family, which was here before the Conquest. I fear that she, at least, chiefly welcomes his presence because he is the one living person who can suppress Charley Padstow. Although of little use to him, he carries an ear-trumpet—a long black tube, indescribably menacing in aspect. He finds a curious fascination in the Major, and watches the movement of his lips with unwinking attention. Whenever he sees them open wider than usual he feels for his trumpet and points it at them, looking round the side of his own eyes in his efforts to follow. Thereby he always reduces Padstow to instant silence.

The salute was fired to the complete satisfaction of all concerned, and subsequently I received, as usual, the formal protest of Miss Erickson, the maiden lady who lives at Rose Cottage, and is thus my tenant. Annually she makes the damage to her nerves, consequent upon the salute, her pretext for refusing to pay the next quarter's rent. As I know that her means are very straitened, I am happy to remit it, under solemn protest, and I only wish, for

her sake, that I could have a birthday four times a year, though for my own they come round too quickly as it is.

To show that her protest is of a public nature and implies no private animosity, Miss Erickson very kindly consents every year to drink a glass of my Comet port and to present me with a tract. The last bore, I remember, the title, "The Days are Passing. Will you not accept this warning?" illustrated by a woodcut showing an old soldier, in full-dress uniform, presumably foreign, as it did not recall any English arm, reeling drunkenly out of a public-house door.

Dear Dick Witham returned just in time for the meal, which we take at 1.30, out of regard for some of the elder among us. He brought with him his wife and his son, the latter perched perilously on the step. As he is a very long young man, with a face even longer than his body, and affects a frock-coat that reaches almost to his ankles, the effect was remarkable. I was happy to know how heartily they were welcomed; even by Franklyn Bates, who is at feud with the County Council on some matter connected with the foot-and-mouth disease.

The dinner passed, as such commemorations will, amid a fire of reminiscences, of little interest to any but those who figure in them. In due course we came to the toasts, a survival, I am quite aware, anathema to modern ideas, but to which we still remain loyal. Our Gracious King, his beloved father, his revered grandmother, coupled with her good husband, for whom I had a special respect, although he did invent the most atrocious head-gear ever thrust upon a long-suffering army—all these

were duly honoured, and I was already fingering the notes I had prepared in readiness for what was to follow, when to my surprise and in flat defiance to routine, Dick Witham rose suddenly to his feet.

"Before we come to the toast of the day," he began, "I have another to propose; one which will surprise you all, and will, I am sure, please you—and no one more than our dear old friend in the Chair. I ask you all to charge your glasses—no heel-taps, mind you—and to drink to the youngest—I will not say the last—the youngest of the Fanhopes."

We stared expectantly at each other, scenting some obscure pleasantry.

"Come, I will put it in another way," persisted Dick. "I give you Miss Estelle Fanhope, May she prove worthy of her grandfather and of all the men who stormed the Alma heights."

Judging from our faces we were none of us much the wiser, but as Dick and his wife set us the example—my godson, who is, I am sorry to say, a temperance fanatic, honouring the toast in lukewarm coffee—we all did as we were bid.

"And now," I was beginning, "perhaps you will explain to us—"

But Charley Padstow must of course choose that moment to assert himself, bursting out, in an atrociously cracked voice :

"Fill up and pass :  
Drink to the lass.  
I warrant she'll prove  
An excuse for a glass."

He had opened his lips too wide. The eager ear-trumpet cut in between him and his voice, and the

song faded into a whine. Mrs. Hathorn, who was sitting next to Cottery, suddenly bent down and kissed him, looking sternly at the major as she did so.

"Tell me, my dear Dick," I stammered, quite knocked off my feet, "have I really—a granddaughter?"

Dick nodded emphatically across the table, but before he could speak Mrs. Hathorn interposed to say, as always, the right thing.

"I don't know about the rest of you good people," she began—and I could see that she was tearing up in her lap the notes she had prepared from which to answer for "the ladies." "I want my forty winks. If Mr. Witham chooses to make mysterious announcements, I am not going to let them do me out of my afternoon snooze. I have always had it—and I always will. I don't know what he means—and I don't suppose any one else does either. Ned and he will have a good deal to say to each other; and I want to be ready for the school-children when they come. And until then I don't care a bunch of carnations—as poor William used to say—for all the lawyers between here and—and Helsingfors."

"But—but——" I was beginning. "I want you all to hear——"

"Sle-o-pe hipe," rattled out my godson suddenly, in a ridiculously piping voice. He has a commission in the Territorials, and was, for the moment, I have no doubt, acting under orders. "The company will advance. By the left. Left wheel. Double." And before I could say a word they had all vanished, Frank Cottery, who was quite at sea, dragged along between the two ladies.

"I—I haven't got a grand-daughter," I said feebly, when Dick and I were alone together.

"You have had one for years," he retorted. "If you will lead the way to your den, and let Mrs. Handasyde clear away, I will tell you all about her."

## CHAPTER IV

WHEN we re-entered the library my birthday presents were, as usual, awaiting me on a table in the centre of the room. The almanac from Mrs. Hathorn, the music-score ("La Sonnambula," by Bellini) from Lord Cottery, and the setting of eggs (in a flannel-lined basket) from Franklyn Bates, held the place of honour in the centre. They were flanked by Father Greatrex's bézique-set and our Rector's bound volume of Tariff Reform pamphlets—this latter an innovation. Padstow's keg was missing, being not yet removed from the dinner-table; Handasyde's pen-wiper, bound in red, white, and blue; Skase's woollen comforter, knitted by his wife in a bright shade of magenta, and the maids' offering, another pen-wiper, in the form of a velvet horse-shoe, were important items in the display, of eighteen presents in all, two of them novelties.

"Your grand-daughter is in America," began Witham, when, having sacrificed before the shrine of friendship, we settled ourselves into our chairs.

"The devil she is," I replied. "And what is she doing in America?"

"When last heard of she was taking down letters in shorthand," said Dick drily. "But you had better let me begin at the beginning. Let me see;

I have already told you of Dicky's marriage—in March 1887. His daughter Estelle was born in the January following, the 13th, to be exact."

"An unlucky day," I murmured, rather to conceal the blankness of my mind than from any superstitious reason.

"With his wife and child he accompanied his father-in-law to his mission-station on the Amberno River in Dutch New Guinea. Six months later the entire party of whites, nine in all, were massacred by the natives. Only the infant escaped, through the devotion of her nurse, an Indian woman."

"God's will be done," I said. "At least he died like a man?"

"Like a brave man. But you shall read the details yourself, here, in this paper. It is a sworn translation of the report by the local Dutch authorities concerning the massacre, and contains the narrative of the nurse."

"And the child?"

"Was adopted by an American, a ship-captain named Osgood, who may or may not have been some relative of the mother. He took her with him on his return to the United States and put her in charge of his wife, then resident in the town of Hartford, Connecticut. He died at sea in 1907, after which the widow removed to Probitville, a town or village in Long Island, State of New York. There she also died, in November 1909."

His dry, copybook tone was beginning to get on my nerves. "How do you know all this? What proof have you?"

He carefully re-tied his dossier before he answered. "My dear Ned," he said, in his own sympathetic

voice, "some seventy years ago we decided that, as we had no brothers by blood, we would adopt each other. We even performed, as you may remember, some fantastic ceremony, borrowed from our notion of Red Indian——"

"We scratched our arms and held them together, so that the blood should mingle. I remember that it stung unpleasantly."

"Our wrists, to be exact. And we bound them together with a very dirty handkerchief—one of yours—with a blue border."

It was a green silk scarf and not a handkerchief at all, but I did not care to correct him just then.

"After poor Dicky's disappearance——" He hesitated.

"Let us forget all that," I reassured him. "I was as much to blame as you."

He looked, I thought, surprised, as though he had expected me to say something else.

"I have always felt that the evidence was not conclusive—and made several tentative attempts to obtain more satisfactory proof, though without success. Five years ago young Brakespeare, the doctor's son, who was articled to me for a time, took it into his head to emigrate to a place called Wenatchee, in the State of Washington, not very far, as distances go there, from Portland. I asked him, if he should ever visit that city, to make such inquiries as should be possible, after such a length of time. In October last I heard from him—you will find his letter here; and what he told me decided me to put the matter into the hands of Balderton's, the famous detective agents of New



York. On Monday I received their final report. It is here."

He rose and put the papers into my hand. "You would like to look at them now. I will leave you for a bit." He passed out through the French window and crossed the lawn towards the orchard.

I remember little of the afternoon's proceedings, though I am told that they were entirely successful, and that I played my part without any noticeable lapses. For the first time in my remembrance, I must confess, I was glad when the end came and the last outburst of shrill childish cheers faded across the hedgerows. Nor, I fear, was I sorry when my older guests, led by Mrs. Hathorn, broke into a suspicious unanimity of yawns and professed themselves utterly worn out and dying for their beds, although it was not yet six of the evening. Before the clock struck that hour I had locked myself into the library and was again examining my dossier, with what eagerness you may imagine.

As I am enclosing the originals in the same writing-portfolio with these notes, for my granddaughter to read at her leisure, I need not enumerate them. I have arranged and marked them in order, and I have little doubt that, should I from any cause be prevented from making her personally welcome to her father's home, they will remove any doubts she may feel as to his origins and family. I have added to them a few notices concerning the Fanhope family and its present unworthy representative, culled from books of reference and elsewhere, which will, I have no doubt, also prove interesting to her. I may remark that the signet-

ring reported to be now in her possession and bearing the engraved crest "a half sea-horse with feet" (an obvious error made by one ignorant of heraldry for a demi-wyvern) supporting a royal crown with a motto beneath it, corresponds to one formerly in the possession of my son. The motto should read "A Azincour"; the crest has been that of the Fanhopes since the battle which it commemorates, in which its then representative distinguished himself.

The last of the documents, extracts from a letter to Mr. Witham from my son, dated the day before he sailed from Liverpool, I have not enclosed with the rest, having destroyed it. It filled me at the time with grave uneasiness. Two points about it struck me very forcibly. Why had Witham never before referred to it? He must have received it within twenty-four hours of our first disagreement, when he tacitly refused to accept my assurance that I had empowered Dicky to draw £200 out of my bank on the day of his departure, although the signature on the cheque was not actually mine. The suppression was the more mysterious that the letter contained references which might have seemed to bear out his contention. Why did he now include only selected extracts, instead of the original? The extracts certainly cleared up some obscurities; Dicky's intention to live under an assumed name and not to communicate with us further until he had redeemed his character and so forth, but the very fact of the omissions suggested that the original had contained something else, something that even now Witham did not wish me to learn.

It was not yet too late to see him and thus to avoid another disturbed night. Half an hour later I stopped before his door in the High Street, very glad to be there, for the evening was damp and chilly and I had chosen the dog-cart instead of the brougham as being the speedier.

He was on the point of sitting down to dinner, but realising my state of mind, excused himself to his family and led me at once into his study. A slight contretemps awaited us there, which had unfortunate results. It was in itself no more than an attack made by a Persian cat, his privileged pet, upon old Trix, who had accompanied me, and entailed no injury to either combatant. It ruffled Witham out of his habitual composure, however, and to no other cause could I attribute his obstinacy when I explained my errand. Not only did he refuse me the original letter; he even intimated that it was none of my business. I kept my temper admirably, while insisting upon my right to see it. He, on the other hand, showed entire lack of self-control, dropping his voice to its most exasperating sneer and meeting my every argument with a flat refusal.

Mere senseless obstinacy I can afford to laugh at, but I began to suspect some method in his madness. Witham's new-found admiration for my son seemed rather a sudden conversion. Possibly the suppressed paragraphs of the letter contained some proof of his previous unfairness. I knew how keenly he disliked to be shown in the wrong, even in small things. Had I been cooler, I hope I should have been more generous; in my then frame of mind it seemed the likeliest explanation.

"I insist—I insist absolutely upon seeing that letter," I told him at last.

"And I refuse—as absolutely—to produce it."

"I order you to do so." From what followed it seems that I must have raised my voice a little.

"We are not in court now, or at school," he sneered.

"You at least need to be taught a lesson," I retorted, rather happily, I thought. "Have that letter I will, if I have to take it by force. If you imagine that I shall sit quietly by while you suppress the proof of how shamefully you have misjudged my son you are very much mistaken."

I had certainly struck home ; he actually quailed before me. Before any more could be said the door behind him opened noiselessly and his wife came in.

I have made it a rule through life never to disagree with a woman who has a high Roman nose. My own Estelle, whose temper was admirable, had a purely Grecian profile, and she quite agreed with me that a Roman nose means a masterful temper. Mrs. Witham's, though well shaped, is large and distinctly Roman. As it preceded her into the room I felt that trouble was only beginning.

"I overheard what you were saying," she said, as though eavesdropping were an accepted virtue. "I have come to give you your letter."


She walked past me to Witham's desk, ignoring his remonstrances, and from one of the drawers took out a small deed-box. From this she took several papers, and, selecting one, handed it to me.

"My dear," protested her husband, "you know that we agreed——"

"I did not agree to sacrifice your happiness to ignorant prejudice, wherever it occurs," she said, quite coolly, but breathing hard. "And now we will leave the General to read it by himself." As she spoke she took his arm and propelled him out of the room, closing the door behind her. Before I had found time to glance at the letter, she returned, carrying a tray, upon which was a decanter of brandy, a siphon, and a glass. She set it down upon a small table by the sofa-head, switched on a reading-lamp beside it, and withdrew without speaking.

I had not read three lines before my hand began to shake so that I could scarcely see the paper. It was a terrible, despairing letter; there was worse than despair in it. To what I knew already was added an appeal for mercy for another wrong, of which I had known nothing. My poor boy had changed, he said, the figure on a cheque his godfather had given him to pay some small debt or other. From five he had altered it to fifty pounds, and had cashed it through some London tradesman, with whom he had an account, the very day he left home. In the letter he begged Witham to honour the cheque lest he be arrested and punished. It was a dreadful letter for his father to read; my only consolation, and that poor enough, was that he must have been out of his right mind.

I must have been stunned by the shame of it and of my own black ingratitude towards my friend, for when at last dear Dick came softly in I was still sitting there fingering the letter, with poor old Trix licking my hand to comfort me, though I had been alone for more than an hour.



What passed between us then it would be blasphemy to repeat. One thing only I will relate, for it shows yet more fully the stuff my friend is made of. He flatly denied that there was any truth in Dicky's self-accusation. He assured me, and brought in his wife to assure me, that the cheque had never been altered. My son might have intended it, they said ; if so, his heart had failed him. When presented the cheque was for five pounds only. This they insisted again and again, with tears in their eyes.

"You have kept it, of course, with the letter?" I asked, knowing how methodical he is in the smallest details. He had not, he stammered ; he only wished that he had. It had been destroyed, with an accumulation of old papers, five years back. He had not put enough weight upon the incident to think of preserving it.

"At least you will give me your word that what you tell me is true?"

He hesitated for only the barest fraction of a second, but it told me all the truth. He flashed a question to his wife—I saw it, though he thought his face was hidden from me—and I saw the tiny nod she gave him in reply.

"I give you my word of honour, old friend," he said, very steadily, "that the facts are as I have said." And his wife repeated the words after him.

I knew that they swore falsely, and why, and what it cost them. And I loved them for it, and it helped me. I felt that their sacrifice must not seem in vain.

"Then I have been worrying myself about nothing," I said, with a dismal attempt at a laugh.

“And we need not think any more about it. That leaves the way open for what I really came to tell you. I am starting to-morrow, or as soon as there is a boat, for America.”

## CHAPTER V

My suggested journey had been, in the first place, no more than a red herring drawn across the trail of Dick Witham's thoughts. But the more I thought of it—and I slept little—the more it grew upon me. I need not recount the various mental steps which finally led to my decision, affecting severally myself, the memory of my dear son, and the duty I owed to his child. It is enough that I did not act upon impulse and that before daybreak my mind was made up. Not only would I make the journey ; I would start at once.

I foresaw many difficulties, chief among them the certain opposition of my friends. I must give them no time to concentrate ; surprise is the first essential to attack. I regretted that I had ever mentioned America to Witham.

When Handasyde brought me my early cup of tea, she was amazed to find me already up and busy, packing a portmanteau. It was above all things necessary to keep her in ignorance. Once startled out of the habit of discipline, she was exactly the sort of woman to lock me up in my bedroom, willy-nilly, while she sent for the medical man. I told her only that I was forced to run up to town on a matter of business and that I should be away from home for a few days. My address would be Morley's Hotel, Trafalgar Square, whence any



letters would be forwarded to me. I was thankful to find that she swallowed the bait, if not unsuspectingly, at least without comment.

I found a good train from Ashurst at 4.27, and as a way of crossing the Rubicon, ordered the dog-cart for two, thus allowing myself time to transact various small pieces of business in the town. Everything progressed so favourably that I began to fear the Eumenides. Witham did not call; Handasyde worked with her customary willingness, completing my packing very much better than I had begun it. I took the precaution of sending my luggage down before me, lest any of my friends should see me on the way to the station.

So successfully had I lulled Handasyde's suspicions that she was not even surprised when I told her to polish my old service revolver and pack it in the portmanteau, a precaution I thought necessary, having heard strange reports about the prevalent lawlessness of America.

I had left myself plenty of time for a last turn round the gardens and paddocks, to visit my favourite flower-beds and to say good-bye to the old African tortoise who lives in the corner beside the stables, and who, I am bound to say, showed little sensibility at parting. Trix, on the other hand, was unaccountably uneasy all the morning, following me like my shadow, dribbling over my boots with more than usual tenderness, and sometimes whimpering below her breath.

Squirrels stands high, on a knoll some quarter of a mile from the high road, from which it is divided by a deep depression or dell. Formerly a farmhouse much favoured by the Romney Marsh

smugglers, it is peculiarly isolated, the lane by which it is approached being actually, though not nominally, a private road, and the only houses within half a mile, Rose Cottage at the corner, and Annington Farm, in the occupation of my neighbour Cronk. I never quite knew my affection for the old place that has been my home for thirty years until I turned to look at it for the last time as the dog-cart topped the hill that would shut it from my sight. The day was very still, so that the smoke from Handasyde's wash-house rose straight into the air; the sunlight positively shimmered on the yellow-washed walls and turned the old three-decker on the bell-turret into a golden argosy. Handasyde was standing in the drive, waving her hand; the old dog in the middle of the road half-way between us, was raising her jowl skywards in protest against being left behind. It is a little picture I shall have with me wherever Fortune may carry my old bones—or leave them.

I flicked up old Naples—so-called because he is the best-looking bay I ever owned—but I had been wise to mistrust the fates. As I was about to turn into the high-road, suddenly, without any warning, as I am ready to swear, a grim, flat-headed grey motor-beast swung round the corner, coming from the direction of Ashurst, at a perfectly scandalous speed. It passed within an inch of Naples' nose, skidded into Miss Erickson's boundary-hedge, and there came to a stop with a suddenness that I hope disarranged its vitals.

"Where do you think you are driving to, you treble-distilled essence of idiocy?" came a voice I knew very well.

Although old Naples would trot down the crater of a volcano without flicking an ear if he knew that I was driving him, this outrage startled even him out of his manners, so that for the time I could spare only a few commonplace curses for the head of the motorist. By the time I had soothed him, Dick Witham was standing in the roadway, patting the horse's neck. "It's all right," he said, with a hypocritical air of forgiveness; "only you really oughtn't to cut round corners at such a pace. Might have been a horrid smash."

Under other circumstances I should have told him what I thought about it pretty freely. But I had no desire for a wrangle. I only said I was sorry he had not broken his neck and that I was pressed for time, motioning him to stand out of the way.

"But I want to see you," he protested, with a hand on the rein. "I have come on purpose."

Knowing his obstinacy, I gave myself up for lost. Just in time some good angel sent Miss Erickson out of her gate, furious at the damage done to her hedge. Dick could not very well ignore her, and I thus got the opportunity to whip up Naples—an unprecedented indignity which he resented by nearly overturning the cart—and to make off down the high-road at full speed.

I had the prescience to turn into a by-road, to avoid the possibility of pursuit—and was able to congratulate myself on reaching Ashurst undetected. But I reckoned without my host—of friends—as you shall hear.

I drew what money I needed from the bank, paid the few outstanding tradesmen's accounts, spent a

few quiet minutes in the Parish Church, where my dear wife lies buried, and so came at last to the railway station.

The first person my eye fell on, as I reached the platform, was Dick Witham. The second was Mrs. Hathorn. The third—in a word they were all there awaiting me, carrying light articles of luggage, Bates in particular a bulging old rawhide gladstone that would have disgraced a casual ward.

"We know all about it," said Dick Witham, ignoring my surprise. "Handasyde—and brains—and work it out for yourself, oh, most cunning of conspirators! And do remember, in future, that a motor can go twenty times as fast as the best cob that ever was bred. Yes, yes, of course—I've got the tickets—to Charing Cross. We can all settle up in the train. Now, does any one want any papers? Don't worry about your luggage, General; I will see that it is all put in the same van." He bustled about the platform, doing nothing with stupendous energy, and to all my questions he vouchsafed only such banalities as "Glorious weather for travelling," or "Going to see if I can reserve a carriage," flung over his shoulder as he raced from one end of the platform to the other.

His fellow-conspirators were equally elusive, and, save that Witham, seeing me in the act of flight, had consulted Handasyde and, thanks to his infernal motor, sent round the fiery cross with a celerity quite unexampled, I was left to work out for myself the prelude to our journey.

I recognised, of course, that the remonstrances I had thought to avoid would open upon me either in the train or after our arrival in town. I was not

mistaken. Scarcely had the guard waved his flag when the storm broke over my devoted head, and I really believe we might have ended up with a bout of fisticuffs, had not Mrs. Hathorn, with glorious inconstancy, veered unexpectedly to my side shortly after passing Sevenoaks.

"After all, he is not a child," she declared, without any warning, during a truce for lack of breath. "If he has made up his mind there is no more to be said."

In this she was wrong, for there was a great deal more to be said, though her desertion was the beginning of the end. Frank Cottery, always her obedient satellite, heartily endorsed her changed allegiance, when some glimmer of it reached him. Franklyn Bates compared me, unflatteringly, to pedigree stock, which crosses the Atlantic without coming to harm; Padstow was silenced by Mrs. Hathorn's masterly management of the ear-trumpet, and Dick Witham, left alone, bowed, under protest, to the sense of the majority.

Once enlisted in my cause, my late assailants became indefatigable—if undisciplined—allies. The following day I passed almost entirely in my pleasant little sitting-room, overlooking Trafalgar Square, while the friendly horde took London by storm. As they proudly boasted, everything was done in record time; owing to some lack of cohesion it was done several times over. Before mid-day on the Friday I was possessed of two distinct passage-vouchers to New York and of one to Boston, of three guide-books to North America, all of the same edition, and of one 'History of the United States,' of two deck-chairs, two steamer-

rugs, three Thermos flasks, and four bottles of three separate specifics against sea-sickness. American money positively showered upon me, dear Frank Cottery adding supplies of the currencies of Canada and Mexico, in case, as he said, of accidents. The disputes over the apportionment of blame and the steps necessary to rectify matters rose at times to such a pitch that I seriously feared the hotel-management might eject us as disorderly characters. In the end the bulk of the work fell to Dick Witham's share—as might have been expected.

Indefatigable to the last, the whole party went down with me to Southampton. As Mrs. Hathorn and Mrs. Witham, who came up to town for the purpose, were good enough to provide me with a supply of very beautiful flowers, we attracted more than desirable attention at Waterloo. In consequence we nearly lost Charley Padstow, who stayed to rebuke an impertinent fellow for audibly referring to us as an 'old-age pensioners' beanfeast,' and only rejoined us at the last moment.

Only just before leaving the train did I discover that I was travelling under a false name. When taking my passage—the fourth—Dick Witham booked it in the name of Moresby. His reason was thoughtful enough—to safeguard me against the American newspaper reporters, who are, he gave me to understand, quite unscrupulous in their persecution of travellers of any note. I must confess though, that I would have preferred it otherwise.

Dick's protecting arm had reached across the Atlantic. Not only had he provided for my comfort on board, he had arranged for a room to be

reserved for me at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York, and in the train he handed me a notebook in which he had set down all the details he had been able to discover about Probityville, my grand-daughter's place of residence, and the best means of reaching it. On the front page he had written, in large letters and red ink: "Special and Urgent. Never enter a taxi-cab in New York under any circumstances. I am informed that they are the veriest swindles"—the last three words heavily underscored.

My last vision of my kind old friends was from the promenade deck of the *Arctic*, when the gangway had been already removed and the great vessel was slowly moving from the quayside. I fear I made a rather conspicuous figure, for I had a huge bunch of flowers under either arm; but I remained at my post until I could no longer see even the gleam of the handkerchiefs they waved to me—until the seven dark figures ranged along the side of the dock had faded into the haze of distance. I wonder if I shall ever see them again!

## CHAPTER VI

It is thirty years since I last trod the decks of an ocean-liner, and, truth to tell, I do not find the new order of things altogether to my liking. I may be old-fashioned, but I should prefer, on shipboard, some faint suggestion of being at sea. Good dinners, well served, by all means ; but not, if you please, winter-gardens and passenger-lifts.

I have found it more difficult than I expected to adapt myself to the change from my usual routine. I was at first very lonely, and tormented by doubts as to the wisdom of undertaking such a journey at my time of life. The great size of the vessel does not prevent her rolling heavily at times, so that, for the first two days of the voyage, not all my bottles of anti-sea-sickness specifics could prevail against it. Afterwards, the presence of so many strange faces all around me filled me with a sense of bewilderment. I fear that my reception of many little acts of courtesy and kindness may have seemed reserved almost to the point of rudeness.

Upon the Monday morning, my first day free from nausea, I made the acquaintance of a gentleman—the son, as it proved, of an old acquaintance, and himself destined to prove a friend indeed. We were passing a small sailing-vessel, a very cockleshell among the waves, seen from our tall decks.



"Just how Columbus must have looked to the angels," said a pleasant voice beside me.

I replied with some suitable banality, and turned to find a tall man standing at my side, also watching the sailing-ship. He was very handsomely dressed, with perhaps more jewellery than I should care to wear, but with a kindly firmness of expression that quite took away any suggestion of vulgarity. His chin was almost square, the mouth shaded by a dark moustache, the eyes grey and piercing. Altogether a very presentable man, who would have attracted attention in any company.

"You must let me make you comfortable," he said, as we moved towards my deck-chair. "I am an old campaigner and know the ropes."

"A soldier?" I asked him, naturally interested.

"Ought to have been," he answered with a faint tinge of embarrassment. "My father was an Army man."

All this time he was making admirable provision for me, finding a sheltered nook for my deck-chair, arranging it at the most comfortable angle, wrapping my steamer-rug around me so that it could not become unloosened, and fetching me with his own hands a cup of bouillon, the deck-steward having overlooked me.

"No need to ask if you have seen service," he said in an interval. It was fortunate that he chose that moment for going after the deck-steward, or I should certainly have betrayed myself. I was grateful that when he returned he did not press for an answer.

"My name is Dayrell," he said, when, having seated me as it were in the lap of luxury, he was

about to leave me. "James Peyton Dayrell. If at any time I can be of any use to you, I hope you will remember it."

"Peyton Dayrell," I exclaimed. "That is a name I know very well indeed. Is it possible that you are related to a very old acquaintance of mine, Colonel Dayrell, of Glastonwell, formerly of the H.E.I.C.S.?"

Again I thought he looked a shade embarrassed.

"He was my father," he answered.

"I am delighted to meet his son," I told him, with a little thrill of enthusiasm and holding out my hand, which he shook warmly. "And do you still live at Glastonwell?" I asked him, for the sake of saying something. "I visited your father there once, many years ago, before you were thought of, I expect. A very beautiful place, in very beautiful country."

"It has been sold for some time," he told me awkwardly, and with some excuse left me. I remembered then that I had heard vague rumours about Colonel Dayrell's son—that he had run more or less wild after his father's death; that there had been some scandal about cards, I think, and that the property had been sold, after being in the family for five centuries.

I blamed myself for my awkwardness, and finding that Mr. Dayrell was placed opposite me at the luncheon table and that there was a vacant space beside me, I suggested that he should take it. He did so gladly as I thought, and has remained my table-neighbour throughout the voyage. A most entertaining companion he has proved, for he seems to have been everywhere and to have seen every-

thing. He resided for many years in the Western United States, first as a rancher, or stock raiser, and latterly as a prospector in the Yukon gold districts, where, I was glad to hear, he has been very successful. He was again on his way thither, after having successfully floated a company in Paris, with such good results that he had hopes of being able to repurchase his family estates. His long residence abroad explained a certain lack, I will not say of breeding, but of that manner and intonation by which we recognise the public-school boy. He assured me later that upon his first return to England he felt as awkward and out-of-place in a drawing-room as might his own groom.

Mr. Dayrell, though certainly the most long-suffering, was by no means alone among my fellow-passengers in extending towards me courtesy and kindness. Mr. Edward Hertenstein, a wealthy American gentleman, and his wife, as well as their daughter Miss Elvira—one of the most beautiful young women it has ever been my good-fortune to gaze upon—were especially obliging, even to the length of inviting me to visit them at their country residence in Melrose, Long Island. I single them out, because through no fault of theirs, I became through them involved in the one unpleasant incident that has marred the voyage. Among the men of our company was a Mr. Talboys, a younger son of that Lord Talboys whose financial adventures caused so much scandal and ruined so many innocent people. I mention this, not as in any sense derogatory to the young man, who can only have been a child at the time, but because it more particularly drew my attention to him. He struck

me as being a pleasant young fellow enough, of the slim, elegant type, well-mannered, and not, I imagine, overburdened with brains. I should no doubt have regarded him with an unprejudiced eye until the end of our short acquaintance, but for a gross piece of officiousness on his part.

On the Tuesday evening I had a long talk on deck with Mr. Dayrell, concerning, I remember, the advantages of a monarchical form of government, as to which we were entirely agreed. It was a pleasant evening, the warmest we had so far experienced, and after Mr. Dayrell left me to dress I remained lying in my deck-chair, enjoying the fresh air and awaiting the familiar "Come to the cook-shop" call on the ship's bugle. I had noticed, while talking to Mr. Dayrell, that young Talboys was hovering to and fro at the other end of the promenade deck, occasionally passing us and going forward, but always returning to the same spot. I paid little attention, thinking, if I thought about it at all, that he was waiting for Miss Hertzstein, with whom he was conducting a desperate flirtation—for which I certainly cannot blame him as, were I half a century younger, I might have been inclined to emulate him. It was in fact through her that I first made his acquaintance. Scarcely had Mr. Dayrell left me than he came towards me and sat down, rather awkwardly, upon the next chair to mine, to which, by the way, he had no sort of right.

"Mr. Moresby," he began, hesitatingly, "there is something I think I ought to say to you."

I told him that I was entirely at his service, but that he had better be quick, as dinner would shortly be served.

He hummed and ha-ed for a time, but at last burst out suddenly, "It's about Dayrell."

I was considerably astonished. "Really," I answered dryly; "and what about Mr. Dayrell?"

"He is—don't you know what he is?"

"Except that he is the son of an old friend of mine, I know little of his private affairs."

"His family is all right, I daresay," said the young man unwillingly. "That doesn't matter one way or the other. It's oh! it is a beastly thing to say—last thing I should have thought of doing myself—but——"

"I am waiting." I was extremely annoyed, and I may have shown it in my voice.

"Well; the fact is, he has been rather palling on to you, you know."

"If you mean that he has been extremely kind to me, I quite agree. If that exposes him to——"

"No, no—of course not. You don't understand what I mean—and—oh Lord, it is so beastly difficult to explain, but people are saying——"

The first notes of the bugle sang out on the deck below us, very much to my relief. It had the effect of still more discomposing him. "There's no time now to explain what I mean. Only—it's like this——"

I half rose in my chair. He leaped to his feet as though I had fainted at him with a knife. "I only want to say that you will be wiser not to play cards with him or have any money dealings with him at all. That's all."

He hurried off along the deck like a scared rabbit, leaving me divided between astonishment and indignation.

Much against my will, I felt it my duty to mention the matter to Mr. Dayrell at the first opportunity, leaving it to him to act as he thought fit. He treated it very lightly. He attributed it to ill-humour resulting from, what was currently reported to have taken place, Mr. Hertzenstein's emphatic refusal of the young man's offer for his daughter's hand. Although this was only to be expected in view of his father's history, his own notorious penury, and the fact that his brother, the heir to the title, after a dissipated career, married beneath him and finally disappeared, so that it was not known whether he was alive or dead, Talboys had taken it much to heart. As Mr. Dayrell had himself paid Miss Elvira some slight attentions he could only suppose that the young man regarded him as a rival, which would explain, if it did not excuse, his behaviour. The kindly way in which he spoke of the young man, pitying, rather than blaming him, only confirmed my high opinion of Mr. Dayrell's qualities.

It was during the night following that my old body broke out in mutiny. I was later than usual in retiring, having assisted at an entertainment organised by the passengers in the cause of charity. On reaching my cabin I was suddenly aware of an intense constriction in my left side, and must then have fainted, for on recovering my senses I found myself on the floor, bleeding from a wound in the head, which I had struck against the edge of the berth in falling. I staunched the flow of blood and rang for the steward, but before he came I again lost consciousness. The ship's doctor patched me up and put me comfortably to bed, and Mr.

Dayrell, hearing of the accident, most kindly spent much of the night by my bedside. I cannot indeed speak too highly of what he has done for me in that and other ways.

Under medical advice I have decided to keep my bed for the rest of the voyage, that I may be perfectly myself on landing. As the time hangs heavy on my hands Mr. Dayrell, with the aid of a couple of walking-sticks, a dispatch-box, and some strong twine, has arranged a bed-desk for me, that I may occupy my enforced leisure in writing. I have already made some little progress in setting down the events of the past week, that, should anything happen to prevent my meeting my grandchild, I may at least speak to her thus vicariously. When completed, I shall enclose this narrative in my leather writing portfolio, along with Mr. Witham's documents and a small present, which I hope she will honour me by accepting as a long-delayed birthday gift. Upon receiving it, she should at once communicate with Richard Elwes Withams Esq., c/o Messrs. Witham, Heatherley and Withams, High Street, Ashurst, Kent, who will, I am sure, act for her as kindly and efficiently as for myself.

My grand-daughter's address is, Miss Estelle Seaton, The Linworth Building, Broadway, New York, and I would ask anyone into whose hands this may fall to direct it to her there.

I set down these few directions as they occur to me, having just heard that land had been sighted and that we may expect to reach port either late this evening or more probably, as the weather is foggy, to-morrow morning. Let me add, before I forget it

that my indisposition has been rendered very much easier to bear by the attentions which have been showered upon me, by passengers and officers alike. The Hertzenstein family, the Prince zu Ehrenfeldt, Madame Concavelli, young Mr. Talboys, of whom I have modified my unfavourable——



## PART II

### PEYTON DAYRELL'S NARRATIVE

#### CHAPTER VII

I don't suppose there ever was a finer figure of a gentleman than old Sir Edward Fanhope—Mr. Moresby, as I first thought he was. I ought to know, because, for professional reasons, I have been studying the breed ever since I was able to study anything.

I first began to figure about it when I was seven. I remember exactly, because that year my birthday was the same as the Michaelmas hiring fair in Newbury, and I walked in there with father, who was a carter out of hire and had a bit of whipcord tied round his hat as was the custom. I lost him in the crowd in Market Place, but I knew that he would be in the tap of the Seven Stars in the evening. I wandered up Northbrook Street looking at the shops. It was all wonderful to me, because at Burghclere, where I was born, there was only one general shop, and in Newbury there seemed miles of them. There was a shop for men's hats and ties and shirts on the left-hand side, about halfway up after you passed the bridge. I daresay

## PEYTON DAYRELL'S NARRATIVE 61

it is there now. I stopped and looked in the window. Some of the shirts in it were ticketed, "Gents' Superfine Quality. Self-fitting, 4s. 6d." Others, on the other side of the window, only had, "Men's Oxfords, 1s. 11d." I can see that window, now, exactly as it was.

I didn't know what a gent. was, and on our way home I asked my father and he told me that a gent. was some one different from other people. I told him I wanted to be one, but he only grunted, and as I was very small and he wanted a lot of steering, I hadn't time to think about it any more just then.

It was when I was a boot-and-knife boy at the old Dragon in Glastonwell that I first saw Peyton Dayrell, who was to teach me all there was to know about a gentleman. He took notice of me at first because there was a likeness between us, as far as there could be between a common boy and a gentleman's son. It was through that that he came to take me into service. He said I might be useful to him, in case he ever wanted to prove an alibi—and he did often. I was very glad to go with him, because if ever there was a gentleman he was one, clothes and voice and haughty sort of manner and all. Not at all the same kind as old Mr. Moresby, I don't mean, but even more the gentlemen in some ways. I was eighteen when he sent for me up to London, and I was with him twelve years—learning as hard as I could all the time—until his death four years ago. So, as I say, I ought to know.

I don't suppose anyone ever went the pace faster than young Dayrell did. His father, the old Colonel, must have been a bit of a terror himself in his young days, by all accounts. For all that, he drove his

son on the curb till the day of his death. After that the son just took the bit in his teeth and galloped off down hill and never stopped until he came to Hell's Gate. Didn't run straight either. I don't suppose there ever was a vice that my respected master didn't stop to plunge in up to the neck, and by the time he finished I shouldn't wonder if he knew more about the business than the Old Gentleman himself. He was always a good friend to me ; I will say that for him.

Of course it was through having such a good model that I found it so easy to be a gentlemen myself. And I never felt more grateful to Dayrell that I did on the *Arctic* this trip. I sort of took to the old gentleman from the first moment I saw him. I went quite red with pleasure when he asked me if I wasn't related to one of his old friends, and when he shook hands with me on it I felt as if the King had knighted me. I never felt that way about Dayrell somehow, though, as I say, he was quite the gentleman in every way. I never thought it more than when he died. It was in Virginia City, Nevada. He got shot down by a man whose wife he had run away with. I found him about ten minutes later, when the blood was nearly all out of him. He died game, as a gentleman should. I was holding him up, and some of his blood got on my coat. "I've spoilt your coat, Hobbes," he said. "Better take mine. Take all I've got. Take my name too. It's a good one. And I shan't want it in hell."

I thought it over afterwards, and I did. His clothes fitted me and we were enough like each other for me to pass muster if I ran up against any of his old friends. He was the last of his family,

so there wasn't anyone to object, and as I had quite made up my mind to live a gentleman's life, it was just as well to have Glastonwell as a background.

I was on board the *Arctic* for professional reasons of course. It happened quite by accident. I was doing well in Paris, at the bunco game, when I happened to get a tip that Madame Concavelli, the opera-singer, was sailing in the *Arctic* and taking her famous emeralds with her that the Russian Grand-Duke gave her. I happened to have by me the fake set that Tiger Flynn had made when he was after them, in London, three years ago. The Larkins girl, who was jealous of him, gave the C.I.D. the office, so he was never able to use them himself and they came into my hands. I had worked out a scheme, if ever the chance should come my way, which seemed sound however you looked at it, if only she was staying at one of three hotels in New York.

I tried what the Bible had to say about it, as I always do before starting anything fresh, and the first words the pin fell on were : " And He said unto them, why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith? " It was in St. Mark. The fourth chapter, towards the end. Nothing could be clearer than that, so I dropped everything and just caught the boat in time. And one of the first things I learnt when I got on board was that the Madame was going to stop at the Astor—one of the three. I have always said there is no getting away from the Bible.

There was only one fly in my ointment—young Ivo Talboys. He is a harmless enough blighter in

his way—rather on the soft side—yet the first slant I took at the passenger list and saw his name on it I fairly squirmed. I believed what I was really afraid of was that he would show me up to old Mr. Moresby. There was nothing else he could do to me that I knew of.

I did all I could to keep out of his way. Not that there was any chance of his recognising me—I don't think he had ever set eyes on me before; but my name was certain to remind him of things best forgotten. One of the last hauls Dayrell made before we left England was to get, I forget exactly, but four or five hundred at least, out of Talboys' elder brother by a trick—a mean trick too, and one he wasn't likely to forget. That is one of the drawbacks of having Glastonwell for a background; you have to take the responsibilities with it.

I ran up against him in the smoke-room the very first evening. Some one must have put him wise to my name, for it wasn't down on the list. He must have been looking out for me, I think. As soon as I came in he got up and came across to me.

“Mr. Peyton Dayrell, I think?” he said, with what was meant to be an nasty sneer.

That was my name, I told him. There was nothing else to be done.

“Ah—yes,” he drawled—he was an affected pup. “My brother was asking after you the last time I saw him.”

I could have given him better than he gave; I knew a thing or two about his brother. I didn't though. It wasn't my cue to quarrel with him.

“Ah—yes,” I said, imitating his drawl. “And where was he when you heard from him last?”

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That finished him. He just turned away without another word. After that we usually took opposite corners in the smoke-room.

I wasn't working the *Arctic* that trip. One thing at a time has always been my motto. All I wanted was to be sure of the size and shape of Madame Concavelli's jewel-case. I knew she kept them in the ship's strong-room during the voyage. I wouldn't have touched them, for that matter, if she had left them lying about on the deck. Some one had to get them to New York, and rather she than I, all the time. I soon found out all I wanted to know, and after that my time was my own. That was how I was able to see so much of old Mr. Moresby. I wanted to study him, at first, as a kind of gentleman I hadn't had much to do with before, but in a very short time I got really fond of him ; he was such a white man all through. Talboys saw it, I suppose, and it was just the spiteful sort of thing I might have expected from him to put the old gentleman on his guard against me.

He gave me a bad ten minutes too, confound him. I had a suspicion what his game was the evening he did it : he kept hanging about, waiting for his chance like a hobbled jackass. A nice flea in his ear he must have got, from what Mr. Moresby told me next morning.

"I explained to him," he said, in his funny piping old voice, "that you are my friend and the son of my friend. And, by God, sir, if I had had a walking-stick in my hand I would have caned the fellow."

I saw my line of country at once. I just laughed it off. Spoke of Talboys in a pitying sort of way, said he was mad because Miss Hertenstein had

just given him the hoof, and that sort of thing. I wasn't troubled with him—not in that way—any more that trip.

I am not exactly a softy in most ways, and it was curious how I used to worry over old Mr. Moresby. He was such a frail old chap, for one thing. Must have been a fine man in his day, the lion-headed type, with lots of white hair and a big white moustache and mild blue eyes like a woman's. He was a bit shaky on his pins, though, even at the start, and he got shakier and shakier all the time. He was very pale—the sort that doesn't look natural—and his hands were so transparent you could almost see through them. I somehow got it into my head he must have had a bad mental shock not very long before. I know what it was now, of course. If I said anything that seemed to bear on his past life he used to get confused and have a sort of frightened look. Although he had plenty of pluck—he must have been an obstinate man in his prime from the way he used to rear up sometimes—he only seemed to have the vaguest sort of idea of where he was going or what he was going to do when he got there. Seemed to think America was a sort of half-settled, savage place, and that to get to the Waldorf you had to fight Red Indians all the way up Broadway. He was quite sure he had a grand-daughter somewhere in the backwoods, but he didn't seem to expect her to meet him. Didn't seem to expect anything, really.

I blame that charity concert for everything that happened afterwards. I might have known it beforehand, for I happened to be consulting the Bible that day about something else, and the answer

## PEYTON DAYRELL'S NARRATIVE 67

didn't seem to have any sort of meaning to it. It was the sixteenth chapter of 2 Chronicles came up, the thirteenth verse, which was unlucky in itself. It read : And Asa slept with his fathers and died in the one-and-fortieth year of his reign." I tumbled to what it meant afterwards.



## CHAPTER VIII

WE weren't much in the way of swells that trip, mostly turn-up millionaires of the kind that eat with their knife, and the usual way-down indistinguishables that look as if they slept in their clothes. Our right-bower was a German prince who had married a Chicago girl, and was on his way to see if he could tell the tale to her popper again. He used to dine at a table all to himself, with his secretary to wake him up in time for the courses. He brought his own brandy along, and got through a bottle at each meal. We had an American countess who had quarrelled with the count—you couldn't blame him when you saw her face, like a disappointed lemon-squeezer—and a couple of Chinks—marquesses in their own country, I think—on their way to the Embassy at Washington. In the English line young Talboys was the nearest thing to a title on board, if you except Fluff Mortimer, who is only a baronet for professional reasons, and makes no secret of it among friends. Except Mr. Moresby there wasn't a man in the whole bunch worth two minutes' real study as a model.

Except for the Dago opera-singers, so far as talent went, you might have had as good a chance of making up a concert-party in a casual ward, but

## PEYTON DAYRELL'S NARRATIVE 69

naturally the usual ass must make himself the usual nuisance, getting up the usual charity entertainment, and because the Prince offered to take the chair all sorts of fossils must turn up and offer their services in the cause of charity. Young Talboys was the usual ass that time, and loved himself in the part, writing out draft programmes and holding pow-wows with battered old ladies in all the gangways, and generally playing pussy-cat poppy-cock all over the ship. He got up a preliminary list, of eighty-four turns I think it was. Then he had the sense to have some kind of a rehearsal beforehand—and cut his list down to five—and had to begin all over again.

Some triple-plated idiot took it into his head to suggest old Mr. Moysesby—wanted to get a cheap laugh out of the old gentleman, I suppose. As Talboys knew it was no good asking himself, he set the Hertzenstein girl—the Copper King's daughter—on him. I happened to be with him when she asked him. He put a lot of questions about the charity, and ended up by saying that he would be happy to assist such a worthy cause, and they could put his name down for a song.

I felt pretty average bad about it, because I made sure some of them would start guying him—you find cattle on other ships besides cattleships crossing the Pond. When he turned up to time in a funny old dress suit that looked as if it might have come out of the Garden of Eden, I believe I went green all over. When his turn came he got up as simply as a child might at a Sunday-school tea-fight, whispered a word or two to the idiot Talboys, who was accompanying him, and launched out on a queer

old-fashioned song, called, I think, "The Tarpaulin Jacket," about a soldier who is telling his comrades how they are to bury him. He sang it in a withered old treble that he hadn't got under proper control, and that cracked whenever he tried a high note—and altogether we ought to have split our sides with laughing. We didn't, though. He had such a sweet old face, and such a serious look, like a kid that is trying to do its best; and somehow he looked so lonely, standing up there by himself in his funny dress suit, singing about the six jolly fellows that were to wrap him up and bury him, that when he had finished, there was scarcely any applause, only a sort of hushed whisper, and half the women were mopping their eyes, and some of the men too. The German Highness, who was three-quarters drunk, had the tears streaming down his face, and Madame Concavelli—who is so fat that she looks as if she had been trussed and larded for cooking, and was covered all over with emeralds like green blobs of perspiration—jumped out of her seat and lollopped up to the old boy, kissed him, and said she would give ten years of her life to be able to move people as he could. And all the time he just stood there, giving a little shy bow every now and then, with a sort of wondering look on his simple old face. Everything fell flat as a pancake afterwards, but I reckon the Orphans got a record collection that trip.

Half an hour after that he was taken sick. I didn't hear of it at once, because I had been roped in to do a turn. A comic recitation it was supposed to be, and I went through it like a deaf mute following his own funeral. They wouldn't let me in at first, because the doctor was with him, and

## PEYTON DAYRELL'S NARRATIVE 71

the steward didn't know whether he was alive or dead. The excitement had brought on some kind of a fit, and he had fallen and cut his head. I waited in the gangway until the doctor came out—and I felt bad. Macdonald, who knows me as well as most men, must have seen it, because he let me go in and watch by his bed that night.

It is pretty well known that out of every hundred men who go wrong ninety-nine have a woman to blame for it. In my own profession you might make it the round number, for besides the ninety-nine who make you give yourself away, there is always the one who does it for you. I have never had much to do with them for that reason, just as I am a teetotaller as near as no matter, and practically a non-smoker. The only woman I have ever been on what you might call intimate terms with—except professionally—was my mother, and all I can remember of her is that she could drink my father under the table any day of the week. She gave me my taste for the Bible, though. I will say that for her. I have never had a friend either—you can trust them almost as little as women—unless you count Peyton Dayrell—since I made up my mind to work entirely on my own. I suppose that is why I cottoned on to old Mr. Moresby so; he got everything that in the ordinary way would have been split up among a dozen people. I remember thinking it all out as I sat by his bed that night.

Next morning he was better again, and from that time I was with him a good deal. I remember, as we were getting near shore, he let me pack for him; and afterwards, when he was thanking me, as

he always did in funny little set speeches for the smallest thing, he told me that I did it so well I might have been a gentleman's servant all my life. He laughed as he said it.

There was an unusual lot of fog right across the banks, and we weren't expected to get in before the Sunday night or Monday morning, according to luck. On the Sunday evening I was reading to him out of the Bible, when Dr. Macdonald came in to see him. I was feeling rather cheerful, because the first verse I had struck on opening it looked as if he might get well after all. It was in Saint Luke, and it read: "He called her to Him, and He said, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity."

I happened to have it in my pocket when I went in to see how he was getting along, and when I asked him if I could do anything for him he said I might read to him a bit. I asked him what he would like, and he said, if I didn't mind, he thought he would like something out of the Bible. I pulled it out of my pocket at once, and you have no idea how pleased he was.

"I am glad—very glad," he said, beaming all over, "to see that you are not one of those who sneer at religion."

I told him that I certainly was not that, whatever I was.

"The Bible is our sure guide," he said, as if he was talking to himself.

It pleased me to hear him say that, because I have always found it so myself. I felt that the Conca-velli emeralds were as good as in my pocket. I asked him what particular part he would like, and he said anywhere in the New Testament. It opened

## PEYTON DAYRELL'S NARRATIVE 78

at Saint Luke, as I say, and he said that would do excellently. I turned over a page or two and began reading. It turned out to be the same story as the novel, "The Prodigal Son" I think it is called. I had just got to the bit about the young blighter being sent out into the fields to feed the swine, when I heard him whispering to himself something about his dear son. He had never mentioned having a son to me before. I went on reading for a bit until I came to the place where the young fellow says, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son."

The berth creaked at that, and when I looked round he was sitting up, with his hand held out as if he was saying how-do-you-do to some one. "I always knew it was not true, Dicky lad," he said, quite loud, as if he was talking to some one. "I give you my word I never believed it."

I didn't quite see how it was with him until I heard him give a little gasp. He set his hand to his side, and his poor old eyes all puckered up with pain. I thought he was going to faint, and I put my arm round him to hold him up. He seemed to be feeling for something under the bed-clothes that he couldn't find at first. At last he pulled out a leather writing-wallet, all crammed with papers. He put it into my hands, sort of eagerly. "Read it," he said. "I have written it for Estelle. You will understand." I took it out of his hands, and he seemed satisfied and lay back on his pillows again. Then he began to mutter under his breath. I couldn't hear what he said. Whenever I tried to leave him for a moment to get at the bell-push, which was just out of reach from where I sat, he would catch at my arm with a funny soft sort of grip.

At last he stopped mumbling and said quite loudly and in his ordinary voice: "Of course I forgive you, Richard. Don't think any more about it. And now, kiss me good night and get off to bed. I think I can sleep now." I could see that his mind was wandering and that he thought I was his son. I leant down and kissed him. I didn't see what else I could do. I remember hoping to goodness that his son had worn a moustache, or that he wouldn't notice mine. He seemed quite satisfied, anyway. He said, "Thank you, my dear child," in his funny polite way, and then he snuggled himself down among the pillows, still keeping my hand in his, so that I dared not take it away.

## CHAPTER IX

I NEVER thought I should be glad to see young Talboys, but when he came in, after knocking so softly that I never noticed it, I tell you my heart leaped.

"Just been looking for you," he began. "Thought perhaps——"

I held up my hand to stop him. "Go like hell for the doctor," I whispered. "He's bad."

He stared for a moment and then went off as I had told him. He was quick too; it wasn't three minutes before he was back with Macdonald. The doctor touched some place—some muscle, I suppose—on old Mr. Moresby's arm, that made him release my hand. Then he told us we should only be in the way, and hustled us both out into the cross-gangway.

Two or three rubberers were hanging around, having seen the doctor pass in a hurry. I fell on them like a thunderstorm and chased them to the other end of the ship, after which I felt better. Talboys was still waiting there when I got back, which made me feel a bit sore, for I didn't see what right he had there. I didn't take any notice of him, though, until he spoke to me.

"Mr. Dayrell," he said, politely enough. It was the first time we had been alone together since that



first evening in the smoke room. "I should like to have a word with you."

"This is scarcely the place—or the time." I reminded him.

"Quite so," he drawled. He has rather a good drawl—the Balliol manner, I have heard it called, and I was sorry I hadn't had more opportunity to study it. "If you could give me half an hour in your cabin afterwards you would not—er—regret it."

I just nodded. I didn't feel like talking then. Pretty soon Macdonald put his head round the door and asked one of us to fetch the dispensary steward. After I had brought him back there was another wait. It seemed hours. Then Macdonald sent him out to say it was no good our waiting. He would let us know how things went, later. The steward said there was no immediate danger. He spoke in the superior way a man who isn't a gentleman always does when he knows something that you don't.

"Will you come along now?" I asked Talboys and led the way to my cabin. It wasn't far, off the same main gangway. I found I was still carrying the wallet the old gentleman had put in my hand. I hadn't noticed it before. I put it down on my berth and turned to Talboys. He was making himself comfortable on the edge of the lower one on the other side. I was in one of the four-berth cabins, but I had it all to myself.

"You are fond of that old boy?" he asked, as if that was all we had come to talk about.

"I am," I said shortly. I did not feel like discussing it.

## PEYTON DAYRELL'S NARRATIVE 77

He dropped his head on one of his hands and seemed to be thinking about something—stretching his long legs right across the cabin under my berth. I waited long enough for manners, and then I asked him civilly what he wanted.

“I am wondering whether I am doing right,” he said, half to himself. “You see, Mr. Dayrell, you are such a comprehensive scoundrel.”

He didn't say it in the least as if he meant to be offensive, rather as if he was talking to some one who wasn't there.

“I have killed men for saying less,” I said. Curiously enough, I didn't feel at all angry. Only interested.

“You can never have heard the truth about yourself, then,” he answered, in the same tone as before. “I can't see myself doing it, somehow. Not that it matters.”

“I don't know what you are talking about,” I told him.

“Probably not.” He seemed to wake up at that. “Well Mr. Dayrell, I want to ask you one or two questions. I suppose we can't be overheard?”

“Quite impossible. Fire away.” Something told me I should be wiser to hear what he had to say instead of firing him out.

“You were in Paris two or three weeks ago, were you not?”

“I was.”

“And you met a man there named West. A son of State Senator West—whatever that means—of Albany?”

“What the deuce—but anyway—what if I did?”

"You had some—some financial dealings with him?"

"Is this the third degree you—but, oh—all right. Did I? What about it?"

"Rather a vindictive sort of person, the Senator, isn't he?"

"I don't know. He has nothing against me, anyway."

"Not against you, perhaps, Mr. Dayrell. But perhaps against Mr. Clarges, from Saint Petersburg. Of the British Diplomatic Service. Don't you think?"

I didn't know that I had advertised my movements in the *Daily Mail*, but he seemed to know all about them. "Well?" I said, "What then? If his son chooses to—"

"Nothing—nothing at all. Mr. Dayrell, did it ever strike you that the wireless telegraph is rather a wonderful invention?"

I didn't answer. I was feeling too interested.

"And that the *Arctic* is fitted with it?"

"He would never—Look here. What do you think you are telling me?"

"I am not telling you anything." He blinked—and that blink made me realise he wasn't quite such a fool as I had thought him. "Go on," I told him.

"You know that Mr. Hertzenstein is on board?"

"Of course."

"And that he is the—what do you call it—the Vice-president of the Line?"

"So I have heard."

He was silent for a time. I began to get worried.

"Go on, man," I told him. "What then?"

"I suppose if any important message came over

## PEYTON DARRELL'S NARRATIVE 79

the wireless he would be quite likely to hear about it, wouldn't he?"

"Very likely, I should think."

"And it is possible that he might tell his daughter about it, don't you think?"

"And she might mention it, in strict confidence, to some particular friend. Shouldn't wonder a bit."

"No, neither should I. Mind if I smoke?"

"Of course not. Have one of these."

"Thanks, prefer my own."

He wouldn't even take a light from me. Quite neatly done, but damnable. It meant something, too, only I couldn't be sure what, exactly.

"Ever do any fox-hunting, Mr. Dayrell?"

I was just going to lash out at him when I saw daylight. "And felt damned sorry for the fox too," I said.

"H-m-m. Quite so. Though I suppose if he wasn't a fox he wouldn't be hunted. Anyway, Miss Hertenstein would agree with you. She was out with—the Quorn, I think it was—last season. Always hoped the fox would escape, she says. Fanciful sort of girl. What do you think about it?"

I had quite tumbled to it by that time, though of course I didn't let on. "What do you?"

"Hard to say. So much depends on the circumstances. If there was any chance, for instance, that the fox might give up stealing chickens afterwards I might see it. But the average fox doesn't change his nature, even when he has lost his tail."

"Exceptions prove the rule, you know."

"Yes, sometimes."

"And in that case?"

"Oh, in that case I should probably say, 'My

dear Mr. Fox, I am going to help you out of a scrape this time, although you stole some—some of my brother's chickens not so long ago. Only do try and run straight in future, or the hounds will certainly get you some time.' Miss Hertzenstein quite agreed with me. But I am talking the sheerest rot, Mr. Dayrell. You must excuse my taking up so much of your time, especially when you want to pack—or something."

"Not a bit, thanks. With this fog we shan't get in before to-morrow afternoon. Can't you hear the syrens going all round us?"

He gave a little shiver, very well done if it wasn't natural. "All round us. Makes one think of the hounds closing in all round that fox."

"Not very likely to catch him in a fog," I said with a laugh.

"They could wait until it cleared, though, and have him then. But I am talking rot again. Mr. Dayrell, you are an older traveller than I am. Supposing, say, the chairman, or president, or whatever you call him, of a steamship line was crossing in one of his own boats, and there was a devil of a fog that held it up, and he had some frightfully important business that he just had to see to, in New York, say, early in the morning. Is there any way he could do it, do you think?"

"I suppose he could arrange by wireless for a tug to meet him and hurry him up to town. Pretty average chance of missing him, though, in a fog."

"Even with prearranged signals, and wireless, and things? I don't know anything about such things, but I should have thought it possible." He took out his watch and looked at it, and then looked up

## PEYTON DAYRELL'S NARRATIVE 81

at me with one of the most puzzled expressions I ever saw on a human face. "Supposing he sent a wireless message that the tug was to wait about, off Fire Island, say, or Sandy Hook, or wherever it might be, and let off a certain arrangement of blasts on her hooter, or whatever you call it, say at half-past nine in the evening, and the liner was to do the same thing when she got to the same place. I should have thought there would have been some chance of their meeting all right. Don't you think?"

For the life of me I couldn't help looking at my own watch. It was just past eight. The dinner-bugle must have gone ages ago, though I hadn't heard it.

"But we haven't finished with that old fox yet," I said, with what was meant for a laugh. "It would be easy enough to wish——"

He held up his hand with a bored air of protest. "We have been a long time over the one subject. Suppose we change it. Do you care for fancy dress balls?"

"If it was amateur theatricals, now."

"Often thought I should like to go to one got up as a French maid. Only I couldn't manage the voice. Judging from your recitation on Wednesday, you could."

"Too big," I told him meaningly.

"Oh, I don't know. Some of them are big. Miss Hertenstein's woman, for instance. Every bit as tall as you are."

"The trouble about those things," I said, "is usually the clothes. One can always manage the make-up." Which was true enough.

He began to laugh suddenly. I wasn't in any laughing mood myself. I had heard all about State Senator West—and what a vindictive sort of brute he was—and what a lot of influence he had up at Albany. Talboys annoyed me a bit, too. I couldn't see the necessity for playing all round the point as he did, without ever coming to it. If anything went wrong there wouldn't be any need for him to be drawn into it anyway, that I could see.

He rose slowly and yawned. "I must be getting along," he said. "Half-past nine—and I must get some food first."

"Surely you aren't going?" I asked him, in some surprise.

"Going where?" He sat down again suddenly. "No—I never was there. Should love to go. They say it is the most beautiful river scenery in the world."

His ears were quicker than mine, though I have nothing to grumble at in that way. While he was still speaking the door opened and the doctor put his head in. In a moment I had forgotten all about foxes and French maids. "Is he—how is he?" I stammered.

"He is asleep now. Sleeping easily."

"How will he——?" I began again, and upon my word, I couldn't finish it.

"I don't know," said Macdonald. "He is old. Seems to me to have something on his mind."

"I know," I said eagerly. "It was his son." They both looked incredulous. "He was an old friend of my father's," I said.

"I don't know anything about that," said Mac-

## PEYTON DAYRELL'S NARRATIVE 83

donald. "He will do until the morning, anyway. Craven, the steward, is in there with him now."

I thought of that tug drawing up closer and closer through the fog. "It wouldn't hurt—if I just went in and had a look at him?" I asked.

Macdonald looked at me in a surprised sort of way. "You have got to be quiet then. If you woke him just now——"

I was just going off when Talboys, for the second time, picked himself up. "I must be getting along," he said. "I expect the old gentleman will be looked after well enough." He was right between me and the door, so that there was no room to pass him. He held out his hand to me suddenly. "Good-bye, old Fox," he said, "and good luck."

As I shot out of the cabin I heard Macdonald's voice, with a sort of surprise in it. "Didn't know you knew him as well as that," he was saying.

The steward was sitting under the shade of the lamp as I opened the door, noiselessly of course. He looked up at me, but I didn't take any notice of him. Old Mr. Moresby was asleep all right. His breath sounded easy and he looked as if he was smiling. One of his hands was flung out so that it was resting on the edge of the bed. I stood and looked at him for a little. I was really sorry to say goodbye to him. I knew there was precious little chance I should ever see him again.

I hadn't been five minutes gone, but when I got back my cabin was empty. There was a big black bundle lying in my berth. It was all tied up with string. Sort of thing a second-hand clothesman would have revelled in. I untied it. The knots were pretty stiff, but I hate cutting string. It is a



sort of whim of mine. I knew what was in it beforehand. It was a woman's get up. Black dress of some dull stuff—bombazine they call it, I think; black hat with a thick black veil; black cross-over cloak. Everything—down to a pair of stays, though I didn't worry about them.

I was on the boat-deck at half-past nine, and my own mother wouldn't have known me—even if she had been sober. I packed all the things I absolutely needed in a small grip. I had Mr. Moresby's wallet in my hand. I must have been a queer-looking woman, but fortunately nobody happened to meet me in the gangway, and after I got out on deck in the fog it didn't matter much anyway. It always distorts things.

It was something like half an hour before anything happened, and I began to get uncommonly chilly, although I had kept most of my own clothes on, underneath. Several men kept on moving about, but I kept out of their way all right. I seemed to hear a lot of hooting through the fog that might have been signals, but nothing happened on our side, until at last, from somewhere up overhead I heard our syren start. Sounded as if it was trying to play "The Star Spangled Banner," I thought. Then a search-light began to glare through the darkness and a lot of deck-hands came trampling along the deck. I kept behind one of the deck-houses until I saw them let down a lubber's gangway. A big man came along with a woman beside him, muffled up to the eyes. I edged over towards them, trying to look as if I had just happened along there by accident, until she saw me. "Ah, c'est Liane," I heard her say. "Mais—dépêchez-vous, Liane."

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Voici le bateau." And so on. I thanked my stars that I could remember a bit of French in an emergency.

"Me voici, Mademoiselle," I squeaked as much like a woman as I could manage. "Ouah—que j'ai peur."

The big man grunted and went down the steps, and the other waited to give me a hand. "N'oubliez pas, Liane," said Miss Hertenstein, as I passed her. "N'oubliez pas, Mademoiselle Renard," said one of the men standing by her, half hidden in the fog.

## CHAPTER X

I HAD plenty of time to figure on the meaning of what had happened, but the more I thought about it the less daylight I could see. If the whole thing wasn't some kind of a trap, which I couldn't suppose, for otherwise, why hadn't they just left things alone?—it looked as if either Ivo Talboys or Miss Hertenstein had fallen in love with my *beaux yeux*—and I couldn't see either of them in the part. For that matter, I couldn't see why the Central Office should be particularly interested in me just then. It was likely enough that young Carter West had written home, whining for more money, and very likely told his father why he wanted it; but from what I had heard of the old man he wasn't the sort of person to publish it, if he could help it. And I couldn't think of anything else that I was particularly wanted for. Unless, of course, there was a new police scandal on in little old New York—and they wanted to make an example out of some one. I decided at last it wasn't any use worrying over things until I had something to go upon.

It was as easy a trip as ever I had. I got a seat right over the stern, and there I stayed. Men came up several times and told me there was a cabin for me down below, but for all I knew I might find old

Hertzenstein himself waiting for me. I didn't want to lift my veil anyway. So I just squeaked, "Non. Non. Non. Ne comprends pas," and after a bit they left me alone.

I am not a sailor, and I suppose there was some one on board who knew, but I shouldn't like to have taken the responsibility of butting through the fog the way we did with the President of I don't know how many Steel and Copper and Shipping Trusts on board. It wasn't until we had got way up past Staten Island that the fog lifted a bit. It was getting on towards morning then, and in the grey light I could just get a glimpse of the Liberty Statue, and then I suppose we swung over to the right. The fog lifted again and there was a pale, pearly light that gave a moment's glimpse of the tall skyscrapers standing up like cliffs at the end of Manhattan—and the next thing I saw was the huge long sign of a Hungarian aperient water over Brooklyn way that always strikes me as being such a curious sort of welcome to America somehow.

There wasn't any trouble about landing. It was somewhere up about 14th Street, on the East River, not the usual wharf anyway—and they seemed to look upon Mr Hertzenstein as if he was God Almighty and had dropped in unexpectedly. I suppose the Customs were somewhere about, but they didn't come my way. One or two people asked me questions, but all I said was, "Oui, oui, monsieur," and stuck as close to Mr. Hertzenstein as I could. And I got through nobly.

I sort of realised what it must be like to be really a woman and let yourself drift into the arms of any one who will tell you where to go. The next thing

that happened I was in a taxi-cab, by myself, going straight away west—after Mr. Hertzenstein's car, I suppose, though I couldn't see it. There was a regular London particular. I kept looking out, and at last I recognised the Academy of Music, and after that the café at the corner of Broadway and Union Square, where you can get more in the way of a free lunch when you are broke than any other I ever struck in Manhattan.

When I saw that I felt at home again, and I signalled the shover to stop. I had the devil's own work to get at my pocket under all the skirts and things I was wearing, but I got there in time and slipped the guy five dollars. I honestly believed he would have touched me for another five, only I got away in time, grip and all complete. In under ten minutes I was in Donohue's saloon over on Third Avenue, and after that it was all plain sailing. Donohue is a good boy, and his clothes just fit me. The next morning, after I had taken a slant at the *Journal*, to see if there was anything likely to interest me, I paid a visit to the home-base and then took another taxi to the Astor, where I arrived tired to death, after having travelled all night from Montreal. My name was Aitcheson, from Moose Jaw; and, by a curious coincidence, I got the next room to Madame Concavelli, who hadn't turned up yet, but whose room was on the sixth floor, looking over Broadway. Ordered in advance.

I had some breakfast sent up to my room and did a bit more thinking over it—but without getting any further. I was most concerned about old Mr. Moresby. I hated to think I might never see him again. I couldn't somehow feel that he was going

to die, but even so I had no idea where to find him again, and precious little time to do it in. My business was to finish off the Concavelli affair as quick as possible and then make a break for the West without losing a minute. I believe I should have dropped even that, only for what the Bible had said and my having the fake set with me. Those near-emeralds were fine; she might wear them for a month and never see any difference.

I had just finished my breakfast, without settling anything, when my eye happened to fall on the letter-wallet I had been carrying around ever since he gave it to me. I picked it up and opened it. It was all stuffed with papers, and the very first thing that I took out was a wad of British bank-notes, neatly tied round with paper and string, with "For my dear grand-daughter" written on it. I counted them. There was just £500. On another bundle that looked like old letters was written "Papers vindicating my dear son's memory." The biggest bundle of all was closely written over, like the manuscript of a book, and without any inscription. It was mostly sheets of note-paper opened out and written on on both sides. There was a crest in one corner, an animal holding what might be a crown, with chains round its neck, and a motto under it, "A Azincour." In the other corner was an address: "Squirrels, Annington, Kent. Station, Ashurst, S. E. & C. Ry." Some of the rest looked as if it might have been sheets pulled out of a child's exercise book, and there was some plain notepaper that I had given him, and a good lot with the ship's name on it, and even some used letters turned over and written on the

back. The first of these I looked at was from one of the big London stores, acknowledging a cheque, and addressed on the top. "Major-General Sir Edward Barrington Fanhope, V.C., K.C.B., etc., etc."

That hit me right between the eyes, because I saw at once it must be Mr. Moresby's real name. It explained so many things about him. It looked as if he had been getting into trouble with the law that he should be chasing off to another country under a false name. I know what that means to anyone, much less an old man : yet I couldn't believe it of him somehow. I looked at some of the other used letters, and they were all addressed the same way. After that I began to read what he had written, and of course that explained everything.

It was very clearly and neatly written, almost as easy to read as print, except in places, where it got very shaky all at once for a page or two, perhaps when he was having one of his heart attacks, poor old boy. He seemed to have written it in five sittings, and I thought the writing of each was a bit less certain than the one before it. I had often wondered what he found to write that kept him so interested. He must have been writing the last sentence, about Talboys, when I went in to read for him the last time.

I don't think I have ever been so pleased as to read, in his own writing, what he thought of me, and how he never had any suspicions that I was not a gentleman born. He ought to know, a general and a V.C., if anyone did. I have no doubt what he says about jewellery is right, and I shan't wear my diamond bosom-pin or studs or links any more.

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That is just one of the outside tips that are so useful.

Pleased or not, what I read didn't make things any easier for me. Simplest thing would have been to send the wallet straight along to Miss Seaton; but that wasn't so easy as it looked. I couldn't run down with it myself, because it was absolutely necessary for me to lie low until the evening, if I didn't want to pay a visit to the Tombs. It wasn't any good sending it by mail, or messenger either. Old Mr. Moresby—Sir Edward, I mean—might think "Linworth Building, New York," was enough address, but he didn't know the Linworth Building. I do. To find one little stenographer in that great warren of a building would take a month of Sundays, and very likely not find her then. I might get at her by advertising, but I hadn't time for that.

Next best thing would be to give it back to Sir Edward himself. But I had lost him too, and had precious little chance of finding him—supposing he was alive. I did ring up the Waldorf, after reading what he said about going there, but he hadn't turned up, although the *Arctic* got in before midday.

It wouldn't do for me to keep the wallet about me, either, because if anything went wrong over the Concavelli business, it would be found on me and taken to the Central Office, and the story given out to the reporters; and I could just think what use they would make of it, and how the old gentleman would squirm at what they said, and what he would think of me for it.

I even thought of sending it to Ivo Talboys, who was at the Waldorf all right; but I didn't feel too



sure that he could be trusted. He had treated me well enough, but I knew he was as poor as a street-sweeper, and that wad of bank-notes would be a big temptation. It might seem so easy to him to burn the writing and pocket the notes and say he had never received them.

I have made up my mind at last to keep the wallet by me until I am through with the Concavelli affair. I don't see how my plans can fail after the careful way I have worked them out. Afterwards, if there seems anything of a stir, I shall make a bee-line for Donohue's and lie low until I can find some way of getting at Miss Seaton. It is taking a bit of risk, but I would do more than that to keep the good opinion of old Mr.—Sir Edward, I mean. I am following his example, and setting down everything just as it happened, so that Miss Estelle may know—in case I don't see her myself—just how the wallet came into my hands, and just what a fine old gentleman her grandfather is. I know what I am saying, too, because, as I have said, I have spent most of my life studying over it. She needn't be afraid of giving me away over the Concavelli affair either. I shan't be using the name of Dayrell for some time to come, and when I want it again I have a pretty good pull politically, when there aren't any police-scandals on, anyway.

I am writing this in the bow of my window looking out over Times Square, and all the lights and bustle of Broadway just before theatre time. I have just been taking an observation, and I find that the Madame is still in her room, so that I have a little time on my hands still. I haven't any doubt that things will go right, because I have been

## PEYTON DAYRELL'S NARRATIVE 98

consulting the Bible again, and the first words that came up were, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Nothing could be clearer than that.

## PART III

### KITTY WILLIAMSON'S NARRATIVE

#### CHAPTER XI

I was down in the Dutch grill at Butcher's when it happened. I had a boy with me. He was rather a nice boy, from somewhere down in Virginia—Newport News, I think—and I was feeling grateful when I thought what some of them are. I didn't feel a bit like supper, but you know how it is, and I took him there because it would cost him less than some of the places. We were up at the end of the room against the wall. One of the girls—Lottie Benderson, I think it was, who was there with a crowd of the English boys playing down at the Bijou in "The Clergyman's Daughter"—began to show them how to do the real grizzly bear. I remember that, and that it was just a quarter of twelve, because I noticed how badly she'd done her face and how the ostrich plume in her hat had all come ungummed in the rain.

My boy told me his name was Japhet, I know, because it made me laugh, and his mother was a Christian scientist and wouldn't let his father have his teeth seen to. He was ordering champagne.

They always do, because they think it's the proper London fashion, although I told him I hated it, and would much rather have pabst or a highball. He was looking down the list wanting to choose the cheapest, and afraid to, for fear I should think him a tightwad. I always feel rather sorry for boys like that, and I was just going to give him some good advice when He came in.

My heart just stopped beating when I saw him. Not because I didn't want him to see who I was with. That is only business, and he knows it as well as I do. But he was looking so tired and anxious. It was the first time I'd seen him for I don't know how long. It seemed years to me. I'd been looking out for him day after day, because I would gladly lie down in the mud and let him walk over me, if only he would, but he wouldn't, because he only looks on me as so much dirt, as of course I am to him.

The first time I saw him was on the *Arcadic*, when I was coming out with the "Girl from Our Alley" company. I was an awful baby then. I had been in service, although my father used to keep one of the best establishments in the millinery in Leamington once. But he suffered reverses, and first I was in service and then I was in the chorus with the "Girl from Our Alley." I think I loved him the first moment I set eyes on him. Of course it was no good, I knew that. He was a gentleman, and I—I wasn't ever a lady, though I should have liked to be, for his sake. He has such dear grey eyes. They thrill you right down your backbone when they look at you. He could have made a decent girl of me if only he had cared to.

He never so much as gave me a second thought. I think I loved him for that too, because they used to say I was pretty in those days. He spoke to me two or three times coming over—but not like some of them. It was as if he thought a girl was a human being same as himself.

You know how it is with a girl. It was a bogus management, and I was left stranded here in New York. And after that—there was Baby to keep. I often used to think of him and how it might have been if only things had been different. Two or three months afterwards I spoke to him on Sixth Avenue, not knowing who he was. I had been ill, in the hospital, and I was nearly starving. He knew me at once—I thought I should have died of shame—it's funny how it takes you sometimes. And he was just—just as if I had been his sister. He begged me to honour him by letting him help me, because we were both English. And I had to, because it was him. And when I wrote to him afterwards, when things were going better with me, he let me pay him back, and never said a word. You don't know what it meant to me. And now—oh, I don't suppose I'll ever see him again. They say it means twenty years for him—or else the chair.

When I saw him come down into the Dutch grill with that worried look in his eyes, I couldn't think of anything else. He looked round as if he wanted to find someone in a hurry and didn't know if they were there. I didn't think it could be me, but I stood up and waved my hand to him. I couldn't help it. He saw me and he came straight across to me—he never looked for anyone else then.

"The very person I was looking for," he said. "I want to see you particular, for a moment, Kitty."

He hadn't ever called me by my name before. I knew somehow that he was in trouble and wanted help. The boy didn't seem to want to go, so I just turned on him and told him he had got to, quick—and he went. I daresay he was frightened. They tell me I can look like the devil sometimes.

Almost before he had gone, Jim slipped something across the table to me quickly. "Slip it in your muff, Kitty," he said. "Nobody must see it." It was a leather case, square—and it seemed full of papers. Mrs. Hugo was letting me wear Lalage Sewell's grey furs that night, because Lalage was sick. There was just room for it in the muff.

He was in evening dress, and he had shaved his moustache off, and he looked so beautiful. He isn't like a man somehow—at least you don't think it of him. He sat down at my table and I poured him out a glass of the wine they had just brought, into my glass. He drank it off, out of my glass, and I could see that his eyes were watching the door in the mirror behind me all the time. And then he told me that it had all gone wrong. He didn't tell me what it was then, but I heard about it afterwards. Because of the police-scandal that the papers are writing of they daren't let him go, because they didn't know themselves who might be watching them; but Mendel, the lieutenant I mean, is a friend of his, and he had given him just five minutes. He had thought I might be in Butcher's—Mendel had, I mean—and Jim had jumped at the chance. There wasn't another person in the world he could

trust to do what he wanted, and would I? I told him—it didn't matter then—that I was ready to die for him if he wanted it. He smiled—just the same beautiful smile that makes you think perhaps there really is a Heaven—and said he didn't want that, but it had to do with money, and there wasn't any man he could trust—and would I? He said I was to read what he had written in the leather case he had given me and try to do what he couldn't get the chance of doing now, because it was the one thing he cared for now, and the old man had been very good to him.

I was just trying to tell him that he could trust me, so that he could be sure it would be all right, when a man came down the stairway and stood just inside the door looking round him. It was Mendel. Last he turned towards our table, and he saw my Jim. He smiled and just nodded. Jim caught his eye and nodded back and then he turned to me.

"He's on time," he said. "He's come for me." He got up from the table while he was saying it. "I expect it means good-bye now, Kitty, for good and all. You won't forget? The old man was very good to me."

I couldn't do anything. I couldn't even cry. I could only nod my head to show I understood.

He was just turning to go when he stopped and smiled again and bent over the table towards me. "It means twenty years for me, Kitty. I should like to kiss you. Last chance I am ever likely to get."

I held up my face towards him and he kissed me on the lips—and—I shan't ever forget, and I would sooner die now than let any——

I can't write what I want to, because it upsets me too much—and I am not strong like I used to be.

He stood up very straight after he had kissed me, and he took the glass—my glass—and he turned round to all the people who were sitting there ; it was very full and most of the girls knew him. He lifted up the glass and he said out loud : “ Ladies and gentlemen, to our next merry meeting.” Then he beckoned to my waiter, and slipped him a twenty-dollar bill and told him he could keep the change. And then he walked up to the lieutenant and took his arm—and I shan't never see him again—never, never again.

I couldn't go back to that—to Mrs. Hugo's, I mean, after that, so I hung it up there till the place closed, and then I walked about till I was tired out, and at last I found I was on Union Square, and I sat down on one of the benches till daylight came. There was a big arc light close by, so that I could see to read if I bent forward. I read what he had written, and all of it. I cried over it because there was no one could see me. I was at the end of the bench, opposite the big central flower-bed : they had some sort of red flowers there then, and they looked just like blood as the grey morning light came creeping over them. It wasn't very cold, but it rained a little. I was under a big locust tree that sheltered me and kept the light off my face if I leaned back, and I could cry just as if I was a girl again.

There was a working-man next to me, an old man with a chin beard that was half black and half white. He was the only person could see me at all.



He was decent, like a working-man always is to a girl—not like those others. I didn't know he was watching me, only suddenly he put his hand on my arm. I was bending over sideways, crying as softly as I could. "Don't you cry, my lass," he said suddenly, but quite low, so the others on the bench couldn't hear him.

I sat up and stared at him. He must have thought I was crazy, I expect.

"Don't you cry, my lass," he said again in a funny sort of soft accent that I hadn't ever heard before. "The devil is king in New York, and if you cry it pleases him."

There was something in his voice, so old and hopeless it sounded, and yet so stern, that made me want to cry all the more. It made me feel what it might have been if my father hadn't died, and before I knew what I was doing I was crying on his shoulder and he was hushing me just like you might a baby. He called me his poor lassie. I had on my pale blue silk with the crochet insertion and the Tagal hat with the green plume that Barney Weilman gave me. He was all in rags nearly. We must have looked a funny couple. He was a very good man.

When it was quite light he got up to go away. He was looking for work, he said. His face looked so old and so tired in the morning light that I thought I might ask him to have some breakfast with me. He wouldn't at first, but I begged and begged, and at last he said he would, but only if I could really afford it. I opened the leather case that my dear love had given me—I may call him that now because he will never know. I don't know

what made me do it, but the first thing that came out was the wad of British bank-notes he wrote about—I hadn't noticed them before. I unrolled them without thinking. They were worth hundreds and hundreds of dollars. The old man saw them before I did, and he put out his great hand that was all lined and seamed with work, as if he wanted to push them away, and he said : "For the Lord's sake, don't show them here, my lass."

We went to one of the Hartford lunch places ; it was on Thirteenth Street, I think, and because I was very lonely and didn't know what to do for the best, I told him about the wallet. I shouldn't ever forget that if I lived till Jim comes out, because he had his mouth open all the time I was talking to him, and he kept on dropping pieces of corned beef hash into it without thinking. I wanted to laugh and I couldn't.

After we had finished we went back and sat on the same bench again. It was about the time the business-houses open, and there were thousands and thousands of girls and young men coming up from the subways and on the street-cars, and they all had somewhere to go to and we had nowhere. And Mr. Craig—he was from Portadown, in Ireland, he told me—and he was a fitter, only I didn't know what that meant. He said he had been out of work a long time, and he didn't suppose he would ever get any again because he was so old. He told me that in the lunch place, and where he lived, when I asked him, because you never know, in case I should hear of anything. It was in East Hamilton Street, No. 2,147. I wrote it down, because he looked so terribly anxious, and I thought it might comfort

him to think some one was trying to help him, because I know what it is. And oh, Miss L'Estrange, I didn't suppose you would know of anything, but if you should, he is a very good man.

All the time we were sitting on the bench after breakfast he was thinking. And at last he said: "My lass, I am not the one to be telling you what you ought to do."

Then I told him that he please must, because there wasn't any hope of my being able to find the young lady, and I was afraid to have all that money about me. I couldn't tell him, of course, about them who would be looking for me everywhere by that time, and if they found me it was good-bye to the money. He thought some more then. He always had his mouth open when he was thinking.

"I know the lure of gold," he said. "You have twenty-five hundred dollars in your pouch that were given you for another, and you are an honest lass. It would be better to place it in the hands of someone you can trust, to see that it comes to the hands of those it is meant for. For we are taught that we should flee from temptation, and great is the power of Satan in this his city of New York."

"I knew it was true, because, however much a girl may want to do right, there may always come a time when she can't, and the first thing I thought of was to ask him if he wouldn't take the money to Miss Seaton. I could see that he was a very good man, and it would be safe with him.

He threw out his hand just like he did before, and he said something about, "Get thee behind me, Satan." And then he got up from the bench, and

he said : " I am a man that is turned of sixty, and I have a son of my old age that is dying of what they call a decline, over there on the East Side." He gave a sort of funny little sob, and I could see that he was trembling all over. " The doctors say that his life might be saved." He stood thinking, and his face was all twitching. " They say a hundred dollars might save his life." Then he shook my hand suddenly and said : " The Lord prosper you, my lassie, and keep you in His care." And then he turned away quickly, and he quite ran across the square as if he thought the Devil really was after him.

It wanted a quarter of ten when he went away, and as I was afraid to go anywhere up town for fear they should see me, I thought I would call at Mrs. Ferrati's, where I have my letters addressed from the people where baby lives with, in Paterson. They are very religious, and they think I work in a dressmaker's in Brooklyn. They are very kind to baby, and I only have to pay eight dollars a month, so I can put up with not seeing her very often. I have always wanted to live just long enough to save up something for her before I die so she won't have to go through what her mother did. She needn't ever know—about me, I mean. She would think I made it in the dressmaking. Only I'm afraid I shan't ever be able to, because my health isn't very good now. Baby is fourteen months, and such a beauty you can't think.

It had made me feel better, talking to Mr. Craig. Sometimes when you are very unhappy you feel like you were the only person things go so bad with in all the world. I don't suppose a good girl would

ever be glad that other people had their troubles too, but it did cheer me up, the company of it. I was still thinking of him when I found that I was in Second Avenue.

"A letter—a for you-a to-day-a," Mrs. Ferrati said, as soon as I went into the store. She is very fat, quite enormously fat, so that I often wonder if she could get through the front door of the little store if she ever wanted to. I don't suppose she ever does. I have never seen her outside of it. She is a very kind woman, and she has a smile that seems to go all over her.

She had put the letter in the pocket of her skirt, and it took her some time to find it, and she kept smiling all the time and made me feel quite warm and happy. Some people can make you feel like that. "And how is my little Bimba to-day-a?" she asked as she gave it to me.

She always asks after baby and calls her that, though she has never seen her, because I told her about her once and what a beauty she is. She is very fond of children. She has had twelve herself, and all of them dead but one, who is in a coal mine. I should have liked her to have had baby herself, because then I might have seen her more often, only the store is so dirty and smells so, and Mrs. Ferrati isn't very clean either.

I thought I should have dropped when I opened the letter and read it. I couldn't say a word to Mrs. Ferrati, who was smiling away all the time. I just walked out into the street, and if I hadn't happened to have a flask of rye in my muff I expect I should have fainted. It was from the lady herself to say that I owed nine dollars with extras or twelve

altogether, and would I come at once and pay her, because she didn't want to keep baby any more. It was quite different to some she had written, short and—and different somehow. I could see—though she didn't say so—that she must have heard something, or perhaps some one had been up in the Tenderloin at night and seen me. I made sure of that, because she said I owed her twelve dollars, and it was only four really—two weeks. I had always been afraid it might happen.

When I could think again I could see the only thing to do was to go over and pay the money and take baby away. I knew Mrs. Ferrati would let me leave her there for a bit, till I could look round. I was terrified thinking of all the things the lady might do if I didn't pay her at once, and perhaps get baby taken away from me for ever. Or perhaps I thought she had got to hear of my being in Mrs. Hugo's house, and she might send baby there, and that would be worse still. But I hadn't got one dollar left of my own, let alone twelve, and if I went back, as I had sworn I wouldn't ever do again after Jim kissed me, she wouldn't give it to me as like as not, let alone that she would half kill me for not having gone back before. And then I thought of the money the old gentleman had given Jim for Miss Seaton.

I was in East Houston Street when I thought of it, and it seemed quite the best thing. If I was only to borrow one of the five-pound notes; that would be worth twenty-five dollars, enough to pay Mrs. Breinstone and something over to pay Mrs. Ferrati while I was finding another place for baby. There wasn't any mention in what the old gentleman had

written of how much it was, so no one need never know, and when things went better with me I could pay it back again.

It all seemed so easy that I went and sat down in Hamilton Fish Park and got one of the notes out of the wallet when no one was watching me, and slipped it into my stocking until I could find a place where they change money for you. I found a loan office on Third Avenue where they did, and I was just going in when I happened to see a piece of the *Journal* that some one had thrown away. It was on the sidewalk, just in front of the door, and I happened to look down as I stepped over it, and there was my Jim's face smiling up at me out of it.

## CHAPTER XII

I HAD to take another nip of my flask ; it gave me such a turn. Then I picked up the paper and it was all full with Jim. Somehow I hadn't thought it would get into the papers so soon. It was a very good picture of him, looking so handsome and with just his smile. I had never seen a picture of him before, and I just kissed it right there on the street, not caring how muddy it was.

It was murder they were holding him for. I couldn't quite make it out at first, because it was all torn and dirty, but I got a later edition afterwards. It seems they had taken him in the act of trying to steal the lady's jewels at the Astor. He would have got them too, I know he would, if it hadn't been for bad luck. Then afterwards they recognised him for a man they were looking for, for getting money from some man in Paris only a few weeks ago, and shooting a man in the Middle West whose wife he was running away with six or seven years back, and several other things.

They said he was a typical British aristocrat and the last heir of a great English family that could have been lords time after time if only they had wanted to. I was so proud to read that about him, because I hadn't known it before, though you only had to see him to know it was true. They called



him a King of Crime in the headlines, and somewhere else they said that he was the uncrowned King of Bunco-Steerers. I always did think he was just like what a king must be and always the best at whatever he did, and I was so proud to think how he had trusted me. They said he was amazingly versatile, and that made me glad too, to see how every one admired him.

Of course, I saw at once that I couldn't take that money and that the paper had been sent to me as a warning. And then, not a minute after, I thought of Miss L'Estrange, and I could see my way clear.

It was their calling my Jim a king must have put it into my head, because often and often I thought she was like a queen, like the fairy queen in a real panto that wasn't only acted. I think she is the most beautiful woman that ever lived. Such a sweet, grave face—proud too—it's wonderful the way she holds her head, as if there wasn't anybody in the world worth thinking about, not as if she thought it I don't mean, but just because they didn't enter her head. She had such beautiful grey eyes, with dark lashes that curve up, and a look in them as if she had been through a lot of trouble and it hadn't hardened her—only made her sweeter and graver. I could sit and look at her for hours; it used to make me feel that I might have been good myself if only things had been different. And her voice—why they say nowadays that there isn't such a voice as she has anywhere else in the world. I heard her sing once—she sang for a charity over on the East Side—and I had to go away, it made me cry so.

I first knew her—to speak to—two years ago. It was when I was trying to get away from Mrs. Hugo's for the first time. A girl I knew had told me about working for the movies, and how you might make quite a decent living out of it if only you could get started. I knew a man who had influence, and I got taken on for a bit by the Schutzenheim Company. They paid very well. Three dollars a day, I got—and others more, that had experience. It was hard work, though. You had to be over at their place, on the New Jersey side, by half-past seven in the morning and often you didn't get away till seven or eight at night. I didn't mind that : I was never the one to be afraid of hard work, so long as I could keep out of the way of them I knew would be looking for me, until I could save enough to get Baby and me out of New York altogether.

We were a mixed-up lot, most of us down-and-outers, and some of the women like me, but one morning on the ferry I saw just the most beautiful face I had ever seen. I was late that morning, just missed the ferry by half a minute—you know how it is sometimes—and had to wait a quarter of an hour. She was leaning over the side of the upper deck looking up the river towards Peekskill. It is a pretty sight on a morning when you have the heart to look at it. I thought she looked unhappy, and wished I had the pluck to speak to her.

She must have felt my eyes on her, because suddenly she looked round and smiled, as if she knew I wanted to speak to her. I was so confused that I just turned round and walked away.

I was angry with myself for being such a fool afterwards.

I was afraid that as I was late they mightn't send the auto back, as they didn't always—because that would have meant walking two miles to their studio, that was out in the woods towards Hilledge. It was there though, just got back from the last trip. Very decent the Schutzenheims always treat their people. Even used to give us a free lunch at the inn there—with a bottle of beer if you wanted it. I can't tell you how glad I was when she got in, though even then I couldn't believe that she was one of us. I heard about it afterwards, though. She wasn't so well known as she is now—and it is very difficult to get engagements unless you make up to the agents—and she had been resting for a long time. She had a worthless brute of a husband to keep, too, that would only drink and smoke instead of working for her—you know the sort. And so she had taken another name and was doing picture work, just like any common girl might do, until something better turned up for her.

They were doing a drama scene that week. It was called "The Gambler's Wife," and there was a scene in it where a little kiddy is starving in the woods and two angels come and take him up to heaven. I was to be one of the angels, and you can't think how proud and happy I was when I found she was to be the other. The girl before her had turned up in drink, so they couldn't let her play it of course. She looked perfectly beautiful in her long white robe—almost like a nightie only with a gold belt and crossover, and her hair—it was all

her own hair, all loose about her shoulders, nearly down to her knees, and a star on her forehead and two great golden wings behind her. Even when she was made up all yellow, which you must do for picture work, because red always comes out black, it couldn't make her a bit less sweet. I was such a fright I used to laugh at myself for minutes at a time. I was feeling good that week, and I didn't mind anything.

The ladies' dressing-room was only a corner of the shack they called the studio, with one little bit of broken mirror for the six of us principals; but she never grumbled once, though, if you heard the things some of us said, you'd have thought we lived in duchesses' palaces all our lives. She was always like that. When it came to drawing your money on the Friday, they put the pay-table out in the meadow and made us line up at it, just like working-men in a factory; and, of course, they kept the ladies waiting till the last; and I begged her to sit down on the grass, because she was looking so tired, and let me draw hers for her. She gave me such a smile; but she wouldn't hear of it.

She was so different from the rest of us that all the men got sweet on her at once; and a nice lot they were. They used to show off before her like a lot of second-hand monkeys in a cheap menagerie. Even old Schutzenheim himself took notice of her—used to explain how the pictures were taken, and all that. But she never had so much as a word for any of them. Not rude, I don't mean that—she was always the lady; but it was just as if she didn't see they were there. It's a funny thing, but I do believe she was fond of that husband of hers,

brute though he was. I saw him once ; he came over to meet her, at the Jersey end of the ferry. Fine-looking man—might have been a—— He was different, somehow. I have read since, in the papers, that he was a lord, or something like that. If it was that, it would account for it ; though I don't know for sure. The time I saw him he was rearing right up on end with jealousy—mad because she came down in the auto, and there were four men in it besides us. Rather she had walked all the way, I suppose.

I have always been glad I plucked up my courage to have a talk with her. It was on the Saturday, and they had kept us very late because the light was good. It was us two angels that they wanted specially, and we had to go off in the auto a couple of miles in the woods, by the Palisades, to a place Lazarus, the producer, had found would make a good background. She was very tired when it was finished ; the kiddy that was doing the kiddy had been very fractious, and she had been hushing him. She hasn't got a baby, amd I have ; but I lost patience with him very quickly. She didn't. She just comforted him up as I don't suppose his own mother would have done, if he had one—a little Yiddisher boy he was ; and he would do anything for her before she had done with him. It was always like that with her. She let me do her hair for her when we got back. Such beautiful hair!—not black, but a darkish brown with a sort of red-goldy light in it. I can remember the feel of it, as it ran through my fingers, now.

It was going back on the ferry that I got up the courage to speak to her.

"Miss Edwards," I said, "I'm so glad we've met."

She smiled at that. She had the sort of smile that you don't see at once and that just leaps out at you suddenly. "It is very kind of you to say so," she said.

That was silly, of course—the idea of my being kind to her, I mean. I'd have done anything for her; almost as much as I would for Jim, only different.

"I've always wanted to ask you," I said, taking the plunge before I should have time to stop myself: "Your name isn't really Miss Edwards, is it?"

I could see that it was just a toss-up whether she would smile or be angry. She smiled at last.

"What makes you think it is not?" she said.

"I don't know." And I didn't. "It doesn't seem to suit you, somehow."

That seemed really to amuse her. "It isn't my real name," she said. "I am really Mrs.——" And then she told me the name. I can scarcely believe it myself, but somehow I have mixed it up. I know the first name was Basil, because I thought it was pretty and suited her, somehow. And I think the next was Talbot, or it may have been Tarbutt. I know her singing name was L'Estrange—Inez L'Estrange. I shouldn't ever forget that. I didn't like it much. I thought it was like the names you read in a dime novel; but, of course, I didn't tell her that. She told me that she was a singer too—at concerts. And she said she hoped we might be friends. She really did, though she must have seen the sort of girl I was.

It was the very next day that they got hold of me again—the Sunday. I had taken a hall-room up on Convent Avenue, where I didn't think they'd look for me, and that was convenient for the ferry. I was just running over to the corner saloon to fetch my dinner ale. Just as I was going into the family entrance, where you have to go of a Sunday, there was Dago Frank, one of Mrs. Hugo's runners. He was watching out for me. I think one of the girls must have put them wise—one of the movy girls, I mean. Before I could scream or anything, he had me in a cab he had waiting; and he half choked me till I kept quiet. I had borrowed a blue enamel pitcher from the lady of the house to fetch the ale in. It went into the cab with me, and I was never able to give it her back.

Mrs. Hugo more than half killed me when she saw me. I knew it wasn't a bit of good standing up to her, because she is one of them who are run by Alderman M'Ginnery, so you have the police looking out for you as well as her runners. I did let a hat-pin two inches into Lefty Jake, her husband, as she calls him; but she said she would break the spirit in me, and I suppose she has.

I read several times about Miss L'Estrange since then. She parted from her husband, I heard. It must have been him that kept her back, because after that she did wonderfully. I did hear that he had killed himself. It was what I had prayed for ever since I heard about him, and I thanked God when I heard it, though I don't suppose what I prayed made any difference to him.

I am writing this in the back of Mrs. Ferrati's store. She has been so kind to me, you can't think.

When she saw I was in trouble she said I could stay as long as I liked, sleep if I wanted to. I went back and asked if I might rest there because I hadn't anywhere else to go, and I was feeling so faint. She made me share their dinner. It was horrible—all grease and tomatoes, and bits of stale fish—but she meant it so kindly. Her husband is mad—he never speaks to anyone all day, but sits frowning at the table and groaning. He is very old—years older than she is. She told me that he gave up his life in trying to unite Italy when he was quite young, and he has never been happy since it was united, because he has nothing else to live for. I don't know what it all meant, but that is what she told me. Her son works in the coal-mines in Pennsylvania. She is always talking about him. It is a good thing as it happens, because I don't have to say anything, only nod, and I can go on writing.

I have thought it all out what I am going to do. Miss L'Estrange is singing at a concert at the Carnegie Hall to-night. I am going to wrap all this up in a parcel and leave it for her at the stage-door, and wait about until I can be sure she gets it. I shan't try to speak to you, because I don't suppose you would like to be seen with a girl like me speaking to you.

She has a beautiful auto of her own now. I have seen you three times driving on Broadway in it, though you didn't see me, and I felt so happy to see how well you are doing.

I have been trying to figure on what Jim would think best of me for doing. I shan't go back to Mrs. Hugo's unless they make me. I know she wouldn't let me have the money. She says that I



owe more for my clothes and things already than I could ever pay her back if I lived to be a hundred. She has threatened to put me in prison for it dozens and dozens of times, when I haven't made enough. I have been praying to God, and perhaps if He doesn't mind He will manage it so that I can get the money together some other way, and take baby away somewhere where they won't know what I was, and perhaps when I am stronger get work in a laundry. It was in a Catholic church that I prayed—in Mott Street. It was a nice church—I could pray easily. It was nearly dark, and there was a beautiful statue of a lady in blue with lights before it. I prayed to her, too, because I thought the face was like yours something, just the same kind smile, as if she understood. I am not the sort that goes much to churches—I should only disgrace them, but you never know. I was reading somewhere—in the *Journal* I think it was—that if you truly repent much will be forgiven to you. And, oh, I do want to do what would make my Jim think well of me if he knew.

Oh, my dear Miss L'Estrange, if things don't go right with me—and you never know in New York. I am only a wretched girl, but she is my baby, and—and—if only you wouldn't mind, as soon as you can find time, because I know how busy you must be—sending to 2,185, Orange Street, Paterson, New Jersey, Mrs. Breinstone the name is—and if I haven't been to fetch my baby it will be because I can't—she said she would kill me next time, and she meant it too. I am only a wretched girl, and it needn't cost you more than two dollars a week to have her looked after well. And I know when she

grows up she would work to pay it back—and I haven't nobody that I can't ask except you. If only you wouldn't think ill of me for asking.

## PART IV

### MISS L'ESTRANGE'S NARRATIVE

#### CHAPTER XIII

It was by a sheer accident that I happened to be in Broadway at all. I had promised to fetch little Pattie Beaumont and to take her up to the concert-hall with me. The poor kid was wretchedly nervous. It was almost her first chance since she got back from Berlin, and of course it meant a lot to her. But for her I should have probably excused myself. Mrs. Van Noorden is an excellent woman, and her Bowery Mission is a very worthy charity, I have no doubt, but the charity concert begins to pall upon me. Wherever charity begins, I begin to think it ought to end before rushing about Manhattan on a greasy night, with the chance of losing your voice altogether. It isn't as if it meant any difference to the Mission. All the seats would be sold out in any case, not to people who wished to hear me, or anybody else sing, but who think it may give them a chance of getting into the Van Noorden set—which it certainly will not.

Pattie has a nice little apartment on West Twenty-seventh, between Fifth and Broadway. I

found her in hysterics—the poor kid has been overworking ridiculously—with her mother, who is quite old enough to know better, encouraging her. It meant really insulting the old lady before I could do anything with her daughter. She wasn't even dressed when I got there, and I had to take the mother by the shoulders and turn her out of the room, and finish the child myself. I was very pleased to do it. I can remember what I felt like at my own first appearance. She looked really sweet when I had finished with her.

We were already ten minutes late when at last I got her away. As a means of cheering her up, I suppose, the mother said she was too nervous to come at all. She was considerably surprised, I expect, when we started off without her and left her to come on by herself in a street car. I told Henri to drive his fastest, so, naturally, when we were just opposite the Opera House the car stopped with a jerk. Pattie screamed, and I looked out of the window at the risk of my larynx. I was afraid we had run over somebody, which would have delayed us still more. There was a huge crowd on the sidewalk and spreading half across the roadway. If Henri had not been a fine driver he must have killed some of them. They made a wonderful study of light and shade under the flashing of the electric signs overhead—I noticed it even then.

I couldn't make out what was the matter at first except that there was a lot of jeering and laughing. All at once the crowd seemed to lurch forward, so that it swarmed all round us, and I could see that it was a fight—the usual disgusting business between a man and a woman. The woman was dressed in

bright blue with a huge plume in her hat. The sort of woman you would expect her to be; her face was red, and she looked as if she had been drinking. The man was a typical East Side tough, with a cloth cap and a striped jersey. He seemed sober enough, but he had a cruel, bestial face that made one shudder. I leant forward so that Pattie could not see him, or it would have been all up with her singing that night. The man had hold of the woman by one of her wrists, and she was trying to get away from him. She seemed half paralysed with fright, and she was screaming out at the top of her voice, "Let me go! Let me go!" The man seemed to be threatening her below his breath, but I could not hear what he said. The crowd was jeering and laughing, as the brutes would. There was a big negro close beside the car. There was some purple electric flash-sign above us. It fell on his face and made his teeth seem all purple when he grinned. It was quite horrible. For a moment I wished Basil was there. He was big at least. Of course, there was no policeman in sight.

"Why don't we go on?" whispered Pattie. I had hold of her arm in case she might try to jump out or something equally silly. When a girl is on the verge of hysterics you never know what she will do next.

I leaned right out of the window in the hope that Henri would hear me. "Go on," I told him. "We are late already."

He half turned in his seat and said something, but I could not hear what it was. The crowd was too noisy. Leaning out as I did my face came into the light. The woman was not five yards from me,

and all at once she caught sight of me. I wonder she recognised me, my face must have seemed striped like a zebra, with every colour of the rainbow. They call it the 'Great White Way,' I know, but I could never understand why. The 'Chromatic Fantasy' would be a better name for it.

As she caught sight of my face the woman made a sudden leap forward that brought her right up to the step, dragging the man after her. She called me by my name with the most surprising leap of joy into her eyes. I did not know in the least who she was, but evidently she knew me. The man was trying to pull her back all the time. "Don't be scared," he said to me with an evil grin. "She's drunk, that's all."

"I'm not drunk," the woman cried. "I'm not. Oh, Miss L'Estrange. Oh, please, Miss L'Estrange." She leaped right on to the step so that her head was halfway in through the window. She threw a parcel, wrapped up in old newspaper, into the car. "It's for you!" she screamed. "Read it. It's yours. It's for you."

The whole thing was like a nightmare—the horrible painted face thrust in at the window, all lit up with the reflection through the opposite side, the man trying to pull her back, the faces of the crowd beyond, leering and grinning, lit up one moment and the next all dark. Then suddenly it all vanished; the man jerked her back so that she nearly fell, the car started again, and the next moment there was no woman and no man and no crowd, only the vague flitting by of lights and vehicles and people.

I had to give all my attention to poor little Pattie.

I am inclined to be proud when I think that I reduced her to sanity in the time it takes a fast auto to travel from Thirty-fifth Street to the Carnegie Hall. I did it, though, and she sang charmingly, thanks to the dope I gave her just before she went on. I really believe she got louder applause than I did. Naturally, I had no time to look at the newspaper parcel then, or afterwards, for we all went on to supper at Sherry's with the Van Noordens. I did not forget it, though, and the next morning I read it in bed.

It took a long time to get it sorted out into some sort of sense, and even then it nearly tore the eyes out of my head, especially what the girl had written, it was so smudged and blotted. I found it interested me a good deal, and I telephoned to put off the Cruegers and had my lunch brought up to me in bed.

I pride myself on having a good memory, but I had quite forgotten the poor girl. I had a vague remembrance of having talked to one of them at that horrible time, but I could not remember her name or even what she looked like. I had a painful sort of interest in what the poor creature had written, because she is so exactly what I might have been if my father had not been a drunken bully who used to beat my mother. I suppose I was a precocious child; I remember I used to study him from the outside point of view without any kind of feeling that I can remember. I got my first impression of the kind of creatures men are from him, and I have never found any reason to change it since. I expect the leading Leamington tradesman used to treat his wife well before he suffered re-

verses, and so his daughter trusted the first black-guard that came her way.

To hear that Ivo Talboys was in New York was interesting, too. I only met him once or twice in London, and I remember thinking what a nice boy he was. A sort of reduced edition of poor Basil in every way I thought him ; not quite so big and not quite so witty and not quite so conceited and not quite so lazy and not quite so weak. I supposed of course that he had come over to pick up a rich wife. I was sorry to think so. With all his faults Basil would never have stooped to that. Of course, I thought his quite detestable sister had arranged the trip for him. I shall not forget that woman in a hurry.

It pained me to see what was the general mob-opinion of Basil. It was quite unfair, of course ; he was really not a bad sort for a man, decidedly above the average, I should say. He was one of the sweetest tempered people I ever met ; his manners were always charming, with just that little touch of homage that a woman always likes, even if she is his wife. He was good-natured even when he had been drinking, and he was always generous, even when it was with my money. If he had only had an income, secured for him under trustees so that he could not borrow in advance of it, and they had put a sovereign on his breakfast-table every morning for his pocket-money, and kept the rest to pay his expenses with, without his having anything to do with it, he would have been almost ideal, as men go. If he had ever had a penny to start with he might have become quite a fine character. It was quite as much my fault as his that



he got into the way of sponging on me, because I found it too much trouble to refuse him. He was nobody's enemy except his own—and his wife's. That I shall always believe. I was quite absurdly fond of him in some ways, and even that morning when I had the actual proof that he had been deceiving me with another woman; I believe I should have forgiven him if he had asked me. He didn't though. He only shrugged his dear old high shoulders and muttered something about its being better for me, and lurched away with that funny lop-sided walk of his, and I have never seen him since. Of course it was much the best thing from every point of view, but I was very unhappy about it for a long time. I am sometimes, even now, when I let myself think about it. There isn't another man in the world quite like him, for all his faults. As to his being dead, that is absurd. He is not at all the sort of person to die. I should have known it too, if he had been. I was quite fond enough of him for that. I believe he started the story about his having committed suicide himself. It is so exactly what he would have done, with some sort of fantastic idea of giving me my freedom without suffering too much himself. I often wonder what has become of the poor old boy and hope he hasn't gone off with that other woman—for both their sakes.

I have never found that lying in bed and thinking about things is the best way to get them done, though that was rather Basil's philosophy of life. I put him away into the background and rang up Charley Lurgan on the 'phone. He is the lawyer to one of the big Trusts and has a big

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political connection, so I thought he might be able to tell me the best way to help the unhappy Kitty Something. I wasn't very hopeful though, and with some reason.

"Not a bit of good, my dear lady," he drawled, in the offensive manner he always adopts to women.

"And why not?" I asked, my bristles rising already.

"Because, judging from what you tell me, Goliath stands in the way. Surely you know all about Alderman M'Ginnery. I thought everyone did."

"I have always understood that David killed Goliath."

"David didn't live in New York. If he did he would be asking Goliath's good word in ward politics."

"I'm not joking," I hissed. The telephone is an excellent medium for expressing scorn.

"Neither am I." I could feel that the brute was laughing. "Listen here, Miss L'Estrange. The Alderman has got Albany in his hand and New York in his pocket. He keeps the police in the lining of his hat and the press in his cigar-case. He owns twenty-five of the brightest——" Something began to bubble on the wire for a moment and I could not hear what he was saying. "Say, did you ever hear of Birdy McGee?" were the next words I could distinguish.

"And I don't want to," I assured him. It made no difference.

"Birdy McGee," went on the cold drawl, "is a particular friend to M'Ginnery. His wife used to be M'Ginnery's sister, but since M'Ginnery pros-

pered they think it better that she should be only a distant relative. In March last, Birdy shot down three men—friends of Turk Bailey, whom you don't know—but who is not a friend of M'Ginnery. He shot them out of a taxi, on East 129th Street, at two in the afternoon. Fifty people saw him do it. He was jailed and brought to trial. He didn't deny it. He was proud of it. The magistrate acquitted him."

"What has all that got to do with it?" I asked, not for information, but because I was thinking what to say next.

"Only that even the most beautiful lady in New York can't fight a cloud with a pitchfork."

"Can't she? We will see about that. Mr. Lurgan—are you going to help me?"

"Anything else in the world. But I am no good at pitchforks."

"I will pay you—well."

I thought that might stir him into some imitation of manhood, but it did not. "Are you richer than New York State?"

"I am very much more in earnest."

"Do you know how long it is until the Presidential Election?"

"What has that got to do with it?"

"The country can't get along without M'Ginnery."

"Will you help me?"

"M'Ginnery is a personal friend of the German Emperor."

"Will you help me?"

"He has the finest house in Ireland. He owns the finest steam-yacht in America. He has won the

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Derby twice. He is the largest shareholder in the Pontifex Distillery Company."

"Which you act for, don't you?"

"For that and my bread-and-butter. Which reminds me. Will you come and dine——"

I rang off, leaving the characteristic specimen of his sex to attend to his—or the Alderman's business. I was annoyed, but I certainly was not surprised. I have never met a man, earning more than twenty per, who was superior to the ideals of his own stomach.

My problem was certainly a hard one. I was due to leave New York for Chicago within twenty-four hours. There was no possibility of putting it off, and the date of my return was quite uncertain. If I wanted Alderman M'Ginnery routed and Kitty Somebody rescued and her baby cared for, and the old General's message delivered, it was clear I must find someone to do it for me. I could think of no one. And just at that moment Marie came into the room and said that Mr. Talboys wished to see me.

## CHAPTER XIV

I WAS out of bed and into my kimono in something less than a second. It was idiotic of me, but for the moment I had quite forgotten there was more than one Mr. Talboys. "Bring him up, idiot," I cried. "How dare you keep him waiting!"

Marie has only been with me for three weeks. She stared at me and departed hurriedly. I had no time to do my hair; I had scarcely even looked at my face in the glass before she came back. "Mr. Talboys," she announced.

"My darling old Basil," I burst out. And then I saw what if I had had the faintest shadow of common sense, I should have known all the time. It wasn't Basil at all.

I had the door slammed in his face before his eyes had time to grow round. Next minute I opened it again and handed him the girl's wallet round it. "Sit down and read that," I told him. "Don't move until you have finished it."

I heard a sort of astonished grunt that somehow made me think of a baby sea-lion I had seen up at the Bronx Zoo only a day or two before.

"Take it!" I said sharply. "Can't you hear?"

I felt the wallet taken out of my hand. "Oh—very well," came the sort of groan I knew so well. And then, a shade more graciously, "Right you

are," and I heard an arm-chair squeak as he flopped into it.

He must have skipped conscientiously, for when I was ready—and I certainly was not more than half an hour—I found he had already got to Kitty Something's share of it. He jumped up as I came in, untwisting his legs as his brothers always did. "Not overburdened with brains," he said. "Now, does that strike you as fair?"

"Not at all," I said, "and I am very glad to see you." And really I was. He wasn't the rose—but he was uncommonly like it.

It was rather absurd, but I found I could not help smiling at him. He was on the broad grin too, so that the ice broke much sooner than I should have expected. "I suppose you were expecting me," he said at last, tapping the papers he held in his hand.

"I thought it was just possible," I smiled. "And what has brought you over here?"

"Haven't you read what my friend the burglar has to say about it?"

"Tell me at once. Why did you help him get away like that? It has been puzzling me."

He wrinkled the tip of his nose. It was like looking at Basil through the wrong end of a telescope. Even the tricks of manner and the tone of the voice were the same. It made everything seem unreal.

"Was it Miss Hertzenstein?" I insisted.

"More or less, of course. Her father was at the bottom of it though. He and State Senator West are not friends."

"And his daughter?"

He blushed. Both of them have rather a nice trick of blushing.

"As soon as it came out that friend Dayrell had amused himself by swindling Senator West's son, I believe the whole Hertzenstein family would have kissed him. Miss Elvira was dead nuts on him."

"And you?"

"It wasn't my business one way or the other. Personally I rather liked the fellow. Funny thing, the way old Fanhope cottoned to him, though. He had swell-mobsman written all over him."

"So that was it? And did the true knight win his lady's favour?"

He tapped the lobe of his ear with his right fore-finger. "It's a little difficult to say. If you mean am I engaged to her, I am not—at least I don't think so."

"Don't you know?"

"It's like this. I promised Alice——"

"I know all that." I did, of course. I have always thought his sister quite the most detestable woman—of the impeccably virtuous type—that ever lived.

"I couldn't have raised the money to get over here decently without her. So, as I had promised, I thought the best thing would be to get it over at once. I knew the father couldn't stand the sight of me. And I couldn't see any particular reason why the daughter should. She could have her pick anywhere if she liked. So——"

"So——"

He wriggled, as a baby might. "It—it was beastly awkward, as it turned out. It was at night—after we had seen the tug off. We walked up

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and down on deck for a bit. Said she rather liked the fog than otherwise. I proposed."

"Ivo!"

"Yes; that is just how I felt when I thought of it afterwards."

"And she accepted you?"

"It is all the way they bring girls up nowadays. No; she didn't accept me. She said she must have time to think about it. Said her father had threatened to disinherit her. And that made her inclined to accept me. That was the devil of it, you see, because it made it look as if it was only her money I was after."

"And weren't you?"

"I wasn't after anything. I only wanted to escape. So I had to tell her exactly how things stood."

"And she was annoyed?"

"I am afraid she was rather. Explained to me exactly how many kinds of a cad I was. That wasn't the worst of it though, because I quite agreed with her about that. But she topped up by formally accepting me. Said she would send the news to the New York papers as soon as we arrived. Nice position, isn't it? My only hope is in the father."

I did my best not to laugh. He relapsed into a gloomy silence. "I suppose you think——" he began at last.

"I think Miss Hertenstein certainly had the laugh of you. And I don't think you need worry your head about it any more."

"Don't you really?" He brightened up instantaneously.



"I don't suppose you are the only young man she ever met—or even who proposed to her."

"No; of course not. I couldn't be—could I? One of the prettiest girls you ever saw in your life. And worth millions. Besides, I'm not the sort a girl like that would fall in love with, am I?"

He was quite in earnest. "I can't imagine any one falling in love with you," I told him, quite untruthfully.

"No. Of course not. I say, you don't know what a load you have taken off my mind. It has been worrying me quite a lot."

"And why have you really come over?" I felt that it was no good fencing with the question.

There was no necessity to meet his eye, and fortunately one of the hooks at my wrist had come unfastened. "Surely you needn't ask that," he said complainingly.

"In that case, why haven't you come before?"

"I couldn't. You know I couldn't. Do you think I should have wasted a moment if I could. Basil was always—oh, well, I needn't go into that. I am rather fond of Basil, as it happens."

"Yet it is over two years——"

He was growing angry, opening and shutting his hands, just as his brother used to. I had no doubt he was wiggling his toes at the same time. Basil always did, as a sort of safety-valve, I suppose, whenever his temper felt like exploding.

"My father needs me," he said, when he had worked off enough superfluous energy. "The poor old man—he isn't happy with Alice."

"I can quite believe it," I could not help saying.

"His mind—well—it is getting weaker all the

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time. She thinks he ought not to be humoured. I don't agree with her. So he has been living with me in Half Moon Street."

"Then why have you come now?"

"He is fretting so after Basil. He is always asking for him. Doesn't realise how things are. Can't understand why he doesn't write. I invented no end of letters, but he was beginning to get suspicious."

He was silent, and I could see that he was in the grip of some unpleasant memory.

"Well?" I asked him gently.

"It got to such a point at last that there was only one thing to be done. I arranged with my old nurse—you don't know her, of course, but she is a good old sort. Understands things. She is looking after him for a bit. Down in Surrey. He thinks I am off shooting with Basil. Promised him we would both be back in a month."

"In a month. But that is——"

"Fortnight for the double journey and a fortnight to find him. Well—the money was the next thing. I am pretty well known to the twelve tribes by this time. Alice was about the only chance. She smelt a rat, of course. Always hated Basil, for some reason."

"I am the reason," I thought.

"It began when they were quite kiddies. Anyway, the only way I could work the oracle was by telling the tale, as they say. Then she went at it bald-headed. Found out the Hertensteins were sailing in the *Arctic*. Made her husband plank down all that was necessary. And here I am."

"I am afraid you won't find him," I said. I

believe tears came into my eyes. Although I would not take Basil back for anything in the world, I could not bear to think that anything could have happened to him. "What makes you think he is in America at all?"

"If he is alive he is in New York at this minute."

"What makes you think—— Surely, you haven't heard from him?"

"He is here—because you are. If you were in Kamchatka I should look for him there. Basil was a little fond of you, you know."

In my heart I believed that he was right. I have often had the feeling that the poor boy is not very far off. "If so, why should he always have avoided me?" I asked his brother.

"Probably for the same reason that he has avoided me—only rather more so. Basil has the devil's own pride tucked away in him somewhere. He probably doesn't mean to turn up until he has shown what he really can do. Some men are like that, you know."

I did not want to discuss my husband behind his back—even to his brother. I determined to change the subject while there was still time. "There seem to be quite a lot of fathers looking for their lost sons," I said, as lightly as possible. "Your old general—what became of him afterwards?"

"I don't know. He got better and came on shore," he said angrily. "And then, to my intense surprise, he began to attack me. It came out with a sort of burst, as if he had been struggling against it and could not hold it back any more. He did it quite nicely, all things considered, without a word

to which I could take reasonable exception, abominably unfair though he was to me. I felt rather as a wolf might if a lamb were suddenly to turn round and lecture him. His point of view interested me a good deal. It was all my fault, of course. The only reason for Basil's behaviour, according to him, was that I had not cared for him enough. His anxiety to make me love him, or show that I loved him, had paralysed every other energy and ambition in him. I had always been cold to him, amiable enough, but showing him that I could get on perfectly well or better without him. Everybody had seen it. Even before we left England Basil had been half out of his mind with it. And the only reason he had come to America at all was that he could have me more entirely to himself, without any old friends or associations to act as rival to him.

Unfair as all this was to me, I daresay there was some little truth in it. Basil was always rather tempestuous in his love for me, and, as far as that went, he was madly jealous of every man, woman, or child, cat, dog, or house-sparrow that I ever looked at. As I used to tell him, and as I repeated to his brother, my idea of love is something a little more solid than mere windy protestations. The man who allows his wife to starve because he is too busy making love to her to work for her may be a devout lover, but he is not a desirable husband. In Basil's case he was not too deeply in love with me to make love to another woman at the same time—though that I did not mention to Ivo.

I confined my defence to platitudes, which is always the best way to avoid quarrelling. I liked

him for standing up for his brother. I was rather surprised, too, to see how fond he was of him. In the end we settled everything amicably ; that love was a matter of temperament, and I couldn't be blamed for being naturally cool-headed, nor Basil for wanting more than I could give him, and that if only things didn't always go wrong it would be the best of all possible worlds, and so on.

All this was too amiable to last, and in the end, the question came, which I had been expecting from the beginning. He put it humbly enough : " When I do find him you will take him back again, won't you? "

" I am very sorry—but no," I had to tell him.

" But why should——"

" We need not go into any reasons——" I was beginning again, when he suddenly sprang up from his chair and began to pace about the room another of his brother's favourite tricks.

" You needn't say it. I know it already," he burst out. " Because Basil is weak and has no ambition, and will never do anything in the world, and is absurdly jealous, and drinks and slacks generally. Whoever's the fault is, we'll take that for granted. And that because a woman doesn't find a man everything she is fool enough to expect beforehand she has a perfect right to get rid of him the moment she thinks he is in her way."

" You really must——"

" Yes, I know. I am beastly rude to say it. It doesn't matter, anyway. What I do want to say is that Basil isn't the same man to-day that he was three years ago. He has had to rough it, we can be pretty sure of that ; he has had a chance of

finding out what things really mean, and all that kind of tommy rot, which I won't inflict upon you. Basil always had it in him to do big things, and now that he has had the time to shake up and find out there are other things worth doing in the world than wearing your heart out and your life and your ambition after a wretched woman that isn't worth it and can't appreciate it and—I beg your pardon, I am sure—I ought not to have said that.”

“Please don't apologise,” I said icily. In my heart I admired him quite a lot. I had never seen anything like it in his brother, or things might have happened differently.

“I mean, then, that when I find Basil he will be quite a different man to the husband you used to have. And I only want you, when you do see him, to take him as he is, and not as something you used to think he was. Will you?”

It was easy to promise so much, and it seemed to satisfy him. I could only hope that when he did find the brother he had such wonderful faith in, as it seemed to me, he might not turn out to have changed for the worse instead of the better. He seemed to read my thoughts. “Don't you fret,” he said inconsequently. “He will have found his niche somewhere and be buzzing round in it like a jolly old squirrel in a twirly-wirly box. You see if he isn't.”

He had been walking about all the time. He stopped and came up to me with his hand out. “I must be off now. No time to waste in this campaign. Only wish I knew how to begin. Might advertise for a start.”

He was not thinking of me at all, which annoyed

me. "You are not to go yet," I assured him. "I am free all the afternoon, and I am going away to-morrow. It is only by the merest chance you caught me."

"I would rather——"

"And I have a dozen commissions for you that I cannot execute for myself. Would you like to hear what they are? But sit down again where I can see you. I want to get acquainted, as they say over here. I may not have the chance again, you know."

He obeyed unwillingly. He had worked himself up to the point of rushing off at once on the chance of finding his brother waiting for him at the nearest corner, I suppose. I might have given him the names of the cafés Basil used to favour most, but it would only have seemed brutal to him.

"I know what they are," he said. "I meant to see about them in any case." He checked them off on his fingers. "One : Rescue Kitty Something and her kid and take them off somewhere where they can make a fresh start. Two : Arrange for our burglar friend to be acquitted—I believe it is quite easy over here if you know the ropes, and I expect Miss Hertenstein can help me. Oh yes, of course, I am going to see her again. One must play the game, you know, and the option is with her. Where was I? Yes, and marry him off to Kitty Something—in goal or out of it. Three : Find the old general, alive or dead. Four : Find his grand-daughter, give her his message, and introduce them. That's all, I think."

"There is number five," I put in. "I am inclined to think that if she is at all a nice girl you

must jilt Miss Hertenstein and marry her. You had better show her to me first and I will advise you."

"There is number six too," he went on, picking up my tone. "Start old Basil and his wife off in double harness again—rather better put on than it was last time."

He stopped for a moment to see how I would take it. When I did not respond he went on in a more chastened way. "That will be all right. I will see to them all except number five. I shall be able to work them in nicely together."

"The modern Hercules," I said, more than a little doubtfully. Basil was always going to do the most marvellous things without any trouble at all. I used to believe him at first. He always got tired of them before they were finished.

"N-n-o. Not exactly. You see, Hercules hadn't any of our modern improvements. With railways and telephones and wireless and things, he wouldn't have thought anything of his little jobs—though I forget what they were exactly.

He spent the rest of the afternoon with me, and I made him stay to dinner as an excuse for putting off the Weisses. I liked him very much. I quite made up my mind that if he didn't take to Miss Seaton I would marry him to Pattie Beaumont. He is the sort of boy that needs to be married—to some one with a will of her own. I should prefer Miss Seaton: it would round things off nicely. I don't think I ever appreciated Basil's good qualities so much as I did when they were reflected to me at this different angle. If he had walked in during the afternoon I believe I should have thrown myself



into his arms. Fortunately he did not. Ivo even professes that he is coming to see me off at the Grand Central at 7.15 to-morrow morning. If he really does turn up I shall begin to believe that I treated Basil shamefully.

## PART V

### IVO TALBOYS' NARRATIVE

#### CHAPTER XV

A wise old owl like Basil would have worked everything out before he began, what he was going to do first and how he was going to do it. I didn't. I am an impulsive animal when I get started, and as soon as I had seen Inez off from the Grand Central I set about hunting up the way to Paterson, New Jersey. I had the baby's address, and that was about all, so I thought I would collect it first and use it as a bait to gather in its mother, as they do in the lion hunts. I don't know if I had any exact plan, such as carrying it through every street in New York and pinching it to make it cry whenever I passed a likely looking house, but that was the general idea.

I found Paterson all right. Some one told me that it was a seething mass of anarchists, but it seemed a bright enough little place to me. I found Orange Street and I found 2,185, and then I as nearly as possible turned tail and bolted. It seemed such an asinine thing to do, to drop into a strange house and ask for a baby, when you didn't even know its

name. They might give me in charge as a kidnapper for all I knew. If I hadn't promised Inez to write her in the evening to Chicago and tell her how I had got on I believe I should have funk'd it. Only I thought she would end up by thinking me just the sort of person she seemed to think Basil was—and that did it.

It was rather a tumble-down little house, of wood, of course—they all seem to be about here—that had once been painted steel-blue picked out with yellow and looked as if it could do with another coat without getting vain. You could see daylight under one end of it, and there were a bay-window and a stoop, both a bit on the slant. There were the remains of a wooden pavement—they call it sidewalk here, rather sensibly, I think—in front, and they seemed to have got tired after that and given up any idea of making a road. I hurried up and rang, so as to cut off my own retreat. A tall, thin, foreign-looking woman opened the door, so quickly that she might have been waiting for me behind it. She wasn't a bit pleased to see me either, said I had come three days too soon and she hadn't got the money anyway. She had on an amazing sort of magenta dressing-gown that was so bright it nearly blinded me.

For a moment I couldn't say anything, but at last I found my voice, just as it was chasing my courage down my right trouser-leg. "I've come to fetch baby," I said, with the nearest thing to a paternal smile I could manage. I didn't remember whether it had a name or not, but that seemed playing for safety.

The woman just stood there and goggled at me.

I suppose I struck her as rather a queer looking father of a family. "You are Mrs. Brownstone, aren't you?" I went on, casting around for corroborative detail.

She just stood where she was, straddling across the doorway and staring at me with a face that hadn't any kind of expression in it whatever.

"Baby," I said, drawling it out as a sheep might. I was getting so worried I felt like spelling it to her. "Baby. My baby. Fourteen months old. With—with—the curls, you know." I didn't know if it had curls, but the chances were that it had hair of some kind, and paternal vanity would pass for doing the rest in case there was any mistake. "You wrote to my wife the day before yesterday that you wanted it taken away. I have come to fetch it."

I don't know if she usually slept standing, but she seemed to wake up at that. "Ach," she said slowly. "You are Mr. Williamson. I thought you was dead."

I hadn't heard of it, I told her. The awful thought had come to me that perhaps she took in babies wholesale, and I might carry off one of the wrong ones. It was too late to back out of it, though. I told her I had been out West—nice wide sound about that, I thought—and had only just got back, and that might account for the mistake. "My wife's name is Williamson," I said, "and so is baby's, and I have brought the money."

Dear old Basil always prided himself on saying the right thing, but he couldn't have hit the mark better himself. It was quite an inspiration, and Mrs. Brownstone gave up any idea of going to

sleep again. So she said, as if she really meant it, "It is twenty dollars."

I would have given fifty gladly if she would guarantee it was the right baby, but I thought it wiser to seem to know something about the business end. "I understood—my wife told me—it was only twelve. Two dollars a week at——"

"It is twenty," said Mrs. Brownstone, as firmly as if she was one of the Pyramids. "In another three days it will be twenty-five."

At that rate, I thought, if I tried any haggling I shouldn't have enough left to get home again before I had finished. I pulled out all the money I could find. I hate those greasy dollar bills that always get crumpled up in the bottom of your trouser pockets. "I've got a train to catch," I told her. "All you have got to do is to write me a receipt"—another good business touch that seemed—"and bring out that baby. I will wait here till you do." It struck me that if I went in she might leave me to pick it out of perhaps a dozen of them. I couldn't even remember whether it was a boy or a girl, and I shouldn't have known which was which if I had. I had some vague idea that at home you tie up one of them with pink ribbons and the other with blue, but I couldn't remember which went with which; so it wasn't much good anyway, besides being very likely the other way about over here.

While I was puzzling it out, Mrs. Brownstone turned, all of a piece, exactly like one of the people in a Noah's ark, and waddled away down a passage. I had to wait about five minutes, which I spent saying what I could remember of the Litany, and then she came back, with a baby over one arm and

a little stringy-looking valise in her hand. "Zee money," she said, holding out her other hand round the baby.

I couldn't see what colour ribbons it was wearing; it had a sort of woolly red overcoat on, that its legs stuck out of just like the pistils of a fuchsia, and a cap on its head like one of the witches in "Macbeth."

If I was on oath, being tried for my life, I couldn't say what happened in the next five minutes. I discovered that the baby was alive when it turned its head and spat at me. It hadn't seemed real before. I suppose I paid all right without fainting; and I know I got a receipt, because I found it next day mushed up with a lot of dollar bills into a squashy sort of ball in my trouser pocket. The next thing I remember is turning the corner out of that accursed street, carrying the baby and the valise. Of course, that was just the moment I must choose to realise what an infernal ass I was all the time, in going after the kid before I had found the mother. She would have spotted it first go-off. Now, if ever I did find her, which was doubtful, it was odds on that it was the wrong baby. If I didn't, I should have the little wretch on my hands for all eternity, or until the real mother tracked me down and ran me in for kidnapping.

It was an amiable kid, which was something to be thankful for. As a young American, I suppose it thought it was its duty to start learning to spit as early as possible. Fortunately it hadn't got very far, only what might have passed for soap-bubbles. It was rather pretty in a pincushion sort of way,

and it seemed to find no end of fun sticking its putty fingers into my eyes and calling me 'Mama' in a voice that sounded as if it were thanking Providence things weren't any worse. I didn't know whether it was old enough to walk, though its legs were thick enough, so I dared not put it down, even when my arm began to feel as if it had fallen off and been badly fixed on again. Besides the soap-bubbles, its nose badly wanted wiping; but I hadn't got a hand free to attend to that. I would have given the world for a drink, but I wasn't sure it might not be criminal to take a child of tender years into a saloon. Altogether, things were looking pretty moderately complicated by the time I got to the railroad depot.

I managed to do a bit of thinking on the way—which is more than some people could have done, overburdened with brains or not—and I made up my mind how to act. I should just take the child back to the Waldorf and give it to the chambermaid to take care of as if it were the most natural thing in the world. If she didn't seem struck with the idea I was going to tell her that I was only a poor foreigner who didn't understand the customs of the country, and would she please tell me what to do with it. Fortunately it didn't come to that; I really had jolly good luck all through.

I didn't get into the smoking-car—felt it might not be proper for the father of a young family. It was lucky I did not. The train was not very full, and on the other side of the aisle, facing towards me, was a fat, motherly-looking woman who began to flirt with the kid even before we got out of the depot. The kid tumbled to it like a

garrison hack ; it was getting a bit sick of me by that time, when it found my eyes wouldn't come out for anything short of tin-openers. It had the most confoundedly sharp finger-nails for its age.

As soon as the woman started making faces at it it began calling her "Ma," or the nearest it could get to it. Then it waved itself at her like a young octopus, and when I hung on to it, it started kicking and lashing out at me as if I was a Turk and it a Montenegrin, yowling at the top of its voice all the time. And, by Jove, it had the machinery for half-a-dozen voices hidden away somewhere inside it.

The woman was a trump. She came right over to my side at once and said, "Let me take it a bit, won't you? I have four of my own." She didn't say it as if she was trying to arouse sympathy either ; seemed rather proud of it. The kiddy took to her at once too ; hadn't another word to say to me, in spite of all I had done for it, and although I pointed my finger at it and said "Goo, goo," and "Chuck, chuck," and all the other appropriate things I could think of."

"Dear little thing," the woman said, very generously, for it had got a fistful of her hair and was pulling it all ways at once. "Your child?"

I was just going to say, "Thank God, things aren't as bad as that," but I pulled myself up in time. "Its name is Williamson," I said. "And it is an orphan."

"Poor lamb," the woman began. I could see she was only just starting. But I meant to get my story out first, or burst.

"Its father was an engineer on the B. & O." I



ran plump into my first difficulty there, because I wasn't sure if the word "engineer" means the same here as at home. She seemed to swallow it without any trouble, so I supposed it was all right and that they do have engineers on the B. & O., which I knew was some sort of railway, because I had seen its name on the advertisements. "He was killed at Schenectady, N.Y." I went on as pathetically as I could. I knew all about Schenectady, because I lost five dollars on the boat over a bet that I could pronounce it right first time. I didn't know whether it was on the B. & O. line, but that didn't matter, because he might have been a passenger at the time, visiting his widowed mother, or anything really. "He was caught in a fly-wheel." That was another wild shot, but the baby upset me just then by dribbling all over the woman's bonnet-strings, and I wondered whether I ought to tell her.

"Poor lamb," the woman said again—and I wondered whether she meant the baby or its unfortunate parent.

"Its mother is dead too," I went on quickly. "She died the week before last. Of complicated gripe"—a good American word that. I was beginning to feel more at home. "Accentuated by grief, the Doc. said." I was rather proud of "Doc." It was just one of those little Americanisms that show you know the language. "I am her brother. Her only brother."

I stopped, to give her a chance to say "poor lamb," if she felt like it. I was just beginning to get a little feeling back into the arm I had been carrying the kid with.

"You are English, aren't you?" the woman

asked. I thought for the moment she might be going to tell me that there was a law that foreigners couldn't own freehold babies in the United States, or something like that, only she said it kindly, as if she knew I couldn't help it and she was sorry for me.

"Welsh," I told her. I had an idea that Lloyd George was rather popular over here. I would have said I was an Irish Home Ruler, I was so anxious to arouse sympathy—only I didn't feel sure of the accent. "I was born within a mile or twa"—"twa" struck me as having lots of local colour about it somehow—"of Haverford West." I stopped near there, with the Wynnes last year, so I knew there was such a place. It was a mistake all the same ; it let loose the love of pedigree that devastates every true American heart.

"My husband's grandfather was Welsh," she began. She was holding back the baby from breaking its neck by tumbling off the seat, with one hand and flattening out her hair with the other. "He was from——"

I had to be rude, but fortunately that doesn't matter in America. "This dear child," I said, "is now an orphan, like myself. I am now carrying out its mother's dying wish." I tried to squeeze out a tear but it wouldn't work, so I passed it off by pretending to have a cinder in my eye. "She had put it to nurse——" It seemed to me the woman was wearing a surprised look, so I went on hurriedly, "with a woman—lady, I mean—in Paterson. She didn't like the people much and she was always wanting to take it away. Only she was too sick." I had been scheming to get "sick"

in, somehow, because I knew it was the copestone of the American language. "She was too sick—very much too sick, and she couldn't get over there. I felt I ought to see to it as soon as she was planted." I had read that in a book somewhere. It means buried. "And now I have."

"And what are you going to do with it?" It seemed to me that she was trying not to laugh, though I couldn't see anything funny in what I had been telling her.

"That's what is worrying—rattling me, I mean. I am rooming with a dear uncle who keeps a dry-goods store over on the East Side." If you remember how short a time I had been in the country I would defy anyone to learn how to bring in more local idioms in one sentence in half the time. "He has only one bedroom, and I have been sleeping under the counter. I somehow feel it might not be healthy for dear little Bertie."

I knew something was wrong before the words were out of my mouth. "Bertie," said the woman. "This child, do you mean?"

I had some idea of saying, "Yes—short for Rosamund, you know," but that might only be making things worse. "Yes, of course," I said with a perfectly idiotic smile. "Dear little Bertie. This child's elder brother. Just six months older and such a beauty. Of course it applies just the same. It is a very small counter, too."

I was beginning to lose confidence, and Heaven knows what mightn't have happened if fortunately the kid hadn't begun to howl and filled up the gaps for me. She was a thoroughly nice woman, lapped up everything I said like milk. I expect she put

any little contradictions down to my being a poor half-witted foreigner. She took charge of the whole proceedings from that minute, and a most practical, sensible body she was. Almost before I knew it she was hustling me out of the train at some station I have forgotten the name of—Boulevard Heights, I think it was, on the outskirts of Jersey City. I shan't forget that station in a hurry, name or no name, because it was in a deep cutting, and you got to the road up a long iron stairway, and I as nearly as possible dropped the kid over the side, by accident, of course. I was getting rather fond of it now that we had been through so much together and I didn't have to worry over its future any more.

On the top of the cutting was a suburban road, the usual frame houses standing back in plots of mud, that was meant for grass, and lots of trees about and even a flower or two in the gardens. Very healthy for the child, I thought. The woman's name was Mrs. Pash, and her husband was something that I have forgotten, and her father was something that I don't remember, and her brothers and sisters were I don't know what, and she had any number of cousins and aunts, and told me all about them from their birth up, and the exact size of the casket each of them had been buried in, and whether it was oak with brass handles or plain walnut with silver plated. She told me all that before we had got to the top of the hill, and left herself time to ask all about the baby's parents and relations and ancestors and connections and hereditary enemies. She would swallow them faster than I could invent them really, though I

surprised even myself. When it comes to a question of not being overburdened with brains I should like to know how old Mr. Moresby would have managed in a case like that.

In the end Mrs. Pash ran me into the house of a woman she knew who took in children to keep, and made all the arrangements, and fought like one of the Gordons at Dargai over a matter of fifty cents a month, and won a glorious victory, and was telling me the best way back to the East Side before I had time to realise that the other woman took in kids at all. She jumped on me with both feet, I remember, because I offered to pay six months in advance when she thought three was enough. The whole thing was only to cost ten dollars a month, with I don't know how many gallons of fresh milk a day guaranteed. Made me think having a family was a much simpler sort of thing than I thought. She is a great woman, is Mrs. Pash, and may she live a hundred years and have a hundred children! I don't wonder America flourishes if there are many women about like her.

It wasn't until I was going up to my room in the hotel elevator that I remembered I had forgotten the name of the place and the street and the people and my own. I remembered the kid's name was Williamson—if it was the right kid of course—and I knew that mine was Welsh and the name of some saint. I felt at the time I chose it I had deserved that. But whether it was Andrews or Edwards or Thomas or Jones was beyond me. But I was so pleased with the way things had gone generally that I wasn't going to be worried by little details like that. The first thing I did was to send off a

telegram to Inez in Chicago, although I knew she couldn't have got there yet. "Hercules whipped to a frazzle," I said. It had a sort of local colour about it that pleased me, whether she understood it or not.

It turned out to be only half-past twelve by the time I got back. I had been feeling that it must be the day after to-morrow after all I had been through. I stood myself a good lunch. I felt I had thoroughly earned it. There were four things I had always heard of as being first-class in America, so I ordered them all. They were planked shad, soft-shell crabs, clam chowder, and terrapin. I couldn't get the clam chowder. It struck me the waiter looked rather haughty when I ordered it, so I had oysters instead. He didn't seem to understand what I wanted at first, so in case there might be anything wrong, I explained to him that I was a food-reformer. I understood when the things turned up.

I stood myself half-a-bottle of Pommery as a sort of bonus, thinking it might give me ideas about rescuing the baby's mother. I didn't get very far, because an ass sitting at the next table, almost in my pocket, interrupted me. He had nearly finished before I started, and I could see he was interested in me by the way he pricked up his ears when I gave my order. Before I got anything he turned round and spoke to me. The usual question, of course. "You are an Englishman, aren't you?" I used to think the Americans always called us Britishers, but it seems that was a mistake. It was English with me all the time.

I was quite ready for him. "I am English," I said. "I am not here on business. I think no end

of your country, and I shall think a lot more of it when I have had time to see something of it. I don't know anything about the Presidential Election."

I had got it into my head that he was a reporter, but it seemed that it was a mistake. He was a long, melancholy-looking man with a beard. "I don't think I quite understand you," he said sadly. "I was going to ask you——"

"I know," I said. I wasn't really insane, and the Pommery hadn't turned up then, so it couldn't have been that. I was so pleased to be sitting down by myself instead of having to worry about giving a wretched baby its bottle that I didn't seem to care what I said. "Please take this vacant chair beside me. I want to ask you something."

He sat down all right, though I somehow got the idea he didn't want to. "I was going to ask you——" he began again.

"If you had to find a shop—store, I mean—that was kept by a man, or woman, called Ferrati, either in Second Avenue or in some street leading off it, only you didn't exactly know where—how would you set about it?"

It had struck me that the Williamson girl would be pretty sure to call there sometime to get news about her baby, and that I could leave a note for her there, or something of that sort. And I didn't see why the melancholy man might not be able to help me as well as anyone else.

"I was going to ask you," he said quite ignoring my question, "if you are by any chance Professor Armstrong, of the University of North Wales. I have come here on purpose to meet him, and I

understand he is staying at this hotel. He arrived this morning by the *Celtic*, but I unfortunately missed him at the dock. My own name is Purvis—Professor Purvis, of Minnewattoc.”

I was no end flattered at being taken for a professor. I told him I was delighted to meet him, and as the Pommery arrived just then I asked him if he wouldn't have some. He looked sadder than ever at that. “I can see that you are not Professor Armstrong,” he said. I was misled by believing myself to hear you say that you were interested in dietetic reform. Professor Armstrong, as you are no doubt aware, is among the leading——”

I hadn't been a professor long enough to be turned out without a struggle. I frowned as wisely as I knew how. “Professor Armstrong is not very sound, I fear, on the question of Ichthyophagy,” I said. I don't know how the word happened to come into my head, unless it was the Pommery, or how I knew what it meant, but it seemed to fill the vacant space admirably. “You will understand therefore——” I hung on the word as long as possible in the hope that he would say something. He didn't; he only looked at me as if he were going to cry. “You will understand, therefore,” I went on in desperation, “why it is I am so anxious to find a store kept by a man called Ferrati in some street off Second Avenue somewhere. My idea was to take a taxi and tell the driver to start at one end and go right along to the other, making inquiries on the way. How does that strike you?”

He wasn't at all a bad sort really, and as soon as he had got it out of his head that I was Professor



Armstrong, he did his very best to be useful. I had to humour him a bit, of course. The thing that interested him most, next to food reform, was that his grandfather was one of the Purvises of Clutton Purvis, in Nottinghamshire, whither they emigrated from some place in Suffolk in 1405, after having been among the most prominent of Hereward's backers against the Normans. I saw I had to let him get it off his chest, and I cheered him up on the way by telling him, what was true enough, though Alice tries to forget it, that my grandfather was a cobbler with a stall in Fore Street, Nottingham, and a good connection about the time of the Goose Fair. He was quite delighted, wrung my hand until it hurt, and said that in that case we were as good as cousins, and I must let him know all the reasons that first led me into becoming an ichthyophagist, and he would send me the latest of the little pamphlets by which he had proved from the shape of the human teeth and the convulsions of the knee-joint, that men were only intended to eat nuts. He said that friendly discussion on such important things as these is as the breath of life, and that he hoped to introduce to me Professor Armstrong, of whose masterly mind he was proud to think his own a pale reflection. I agreed with him about everything—it was the least I could do, having ordered another half of Pommery—and promised to send him a copy of a pamphlet I was thinking of publishing about the shape and size of the herring-bone considered in the light of the convolution of the greater intestine. After an effort like that I let him simmer for a bit, and then turned him gently into Second Avenue.

He didn't think much of the taxi-cab idea. He said it might mean starting ten miles out in the country, because some of the New York avenues never seem able to make up their minds where to stop, and that taxi-cab fare would probably be about three thousand dollars. He smiled sadly at that, and said he was from Missouri, and I had to tell him—whatever that meant—and he had had his first ride in a New York taxi that morning, so he spoke with feeling. He went on to tell me that there were, I forget how many million Dagos in New York, most of them on the East Side, where Second Avenue was, and that Ferrati was a common Italian name, and I should probably find a couple of hundred stores of that name in Second Avenue.

I remembered that it was probably somewhere near a place called Hamilton Fish Park and that cheered him up a lot, because, he said, he had been wondering why I was so interested in Mr. Ferrati, and of course that explained everything. If it was a sea-food market it would surely be easy to find. We asked the waiter, but he didn't know; and he asked another waiter, who said it was somewhere in Canal Street, and the wine waiter said it was over in Brooklyn, and altogether they got up quite a healthy argument over it.

In the middle of it the Professor suddenly jumped up. "Excuse me," he said, "but you see that red-faced gentleman who has just come in. He must be an Englishman. Very probably Professor Armstrong himself. Will you excuse me?" Then he shook hands—they seem to revel in shaking hands over there—and said that he wished me every success in my glorious mission, and that I was

to be sure to look in whenever I was passing, and then he faded away across the room, and I saw him take a chair and sit down at the red-faced man's table.

I felt lonely after he had gone, and as there were about fifty waiters by that time wrangling over Hamilton Fish Park, which was getting pushed clear out of the State between them, I slipped out and asked one of the bell-boys. He knew all right—those little devils know everything and more too. He told me what street-car to take and the address of a café that was kept by an Italian who was the head of some secret society for doing murders at popular prices, and knew every professional Italian murderer in New York and quite a lot who were only amateurs. So off I went to look for him.

## CHAPTER XVI

IF I had known what I was letting myself in for I suppose I should never have gone, and then I should have always regretted it without knowing it. I must have spent a couple of hours wandering about some of the maddest sort of places that ever happened. It wasn't so much the streets or the houses ; most of them might have been in a shabby part of Bloomsbury, except that they were painted a cold red imitation brick-colour and had iron fire-escapes zig-zagging down the front of them. If you stood at the corner of some of the streets and looked down them it was just as if they were all grown over with wisteria stems without any leaves on them. It was the people finished me, though. Towers of Babel weren't in it with them. They seemed to live in the open air, all of them ; and their places looked so filthy you couldn't blame them. Whenever they could find a bit of waste land their great idea seemed to be to squat down on it and start playing shop with some dirty old iron or a bundle of rags, or some dried fish that was left over from Noah's dinner. When they weren't doing that they were arguing about it, all over the road, with lorries and carts and wagons butting through them as though they weren't there, and men playing cat's cradle in and out of them with little

push-carts with bells strung over the top of them, tinkling away like the *Ranche des Vaches*. Not one of the stores had so much as one English word about them : they were all set out in Yiddish or Russian or Italian or Mumbo-Jumbo or Greek. Most of the things they sold were the kind you only come across in nightmares, and the smells that came out of some of them were like Post-Impressionist paintings.

Pretty soon I began to feel like a shipwrecked mariner cast away in a Turkish lunatic asylum, and the sight of real New York bobbies in their neat uniforms, twirling their clubs between their fingers and looking thoroughly bored with life at some of the street-corners, was like the "*Miner's Dream of Home*." I spoke to one of them, more to remind myself that I was awake than for anything else. He was a nice fellow, though he did smile when I told him I was looking for an Italian called Ferrati who kept a store where he sold things. He told me I had better try the regular Italian quarter, over the other side of the Bowery, wherever that was. He didn't seem to think I had even a sporting chance though—and neither did I.

It was different when I asked him about Buonomici, the bell-boy's little friend. He opened his eyes when I told him who I wanted, and I felt I had put my foot in it somehow. Then he said it was close by, and he would take me there. I had another short nightmare, and when I woke up we were outside a dirty café in a street so much dirtier that it looked positively dazzling. My policeman rapped with his club on the window, and when a man came to the door he said : "Say, Joe, fix this

guy up with what he wants. He's a friend of mine." Then he gave his moustache an extra twirl and said he would wait outside in case I wanted him.

Mr. Buonamici was one of the six fattest men I ever saw, though it is true he didn't come near the Cloud. He had quite a fair-sized space behind his counter, but he had to get into it sideways, and when he turned round he stuck out about a foot over it. I suppose it has something to do with the climate; I have seen fatter people in New York, and more of them, than anywhere else in the world. He was quite friendly, especially when I asked him to have a drink and to serve one round to the half-dozen frowsy-looking assassins who were lounging about the bar. I thought it would make the atmosphere right, but it was a mistake. They all wanted to kiss me, and when I told them who I was after they all started off like a pack of hounds on a strong scent arguing about which Ferrati I wanted. I took down particulars of about ninety, and then, as there seemed a prospect of a free fight, and I didn't know whether they used knives or bombs, I remembered an appointment with my bankers, and slipped away. My policeman was waiting outside, as bored as ever. He wasn't surprised I hadn't got any farther, and led the way back to the place I had first met him, as slow as a funeral, so that he could tell me that his grandmother came from Kidderminster, England, and he himself would have been born in Dublin only his mother happened to be in Brooklyn at the time. I didn't exactly know what was the proper etiquette in a case like his. I asked him if he would have a

drink, but he said he didn't approve of it. I didn't like to offer him money, he had such an aristocratic manner, so in the end I only shook hands with him and told him to be sure and drop in whenever he was passing, which seems to be the proper thing to say over here.

I quite gave over any hope of finding the kid's mother that way, and I more than half made up my mind to look up friend Dayrell in the Tombs, if he was there, and see if he could give me any tip where to find her. I was just looking round for someone who looked as if they could speak some European language when I found myself in Hamilton Fish Park, without in the least knowing how I got there.

I was a bit disappointed with it somehow. I had been thinking such a lot about it that I am not sure I hadn't expected to find a trout-stream or a salmon-hatchery or something. It turned out to be rather a desolate little square that must have forgotten years ago what a blade of grass looks like. It had been taken by storm by the Polish Jews of the neighbourhood, as the nearest thing they could find to the market-place in Warsaw or Krakau, I suppose. They were camped there as thick as guillemots on the Bass Rock, amusing themselves by selling each other second-hand penknives.

I was standing at one corner of it watching a riot between two old Jewish women, with shaven heads and wigs made of some kind of wood-shavings. I was wishing I could understand something of what they said—it sounded no end interesting—when one of them charged the other, and the crowd of us had to lurch back into the roadway to save our

eyes. I happened to look up, and not two streets off I saw a bright blue dress going round a corner.

It was much too good to be true, but off I pelted, and by the time I got to the corner that blue dress was half-way down the next street. I chased after it like a lunatic ; I had quite made up my mind that it was the one I was looking for. It turned down another side street before I could catch up with it and when I turned after it it wasn't anywhere in sight. I ran up and down a bit, looking into doorways and side-alleys, without any luck. Then as I ran back for the last time I nearly capsized over three solemn, small people who were holding a pow-wow in the gutter. They were just in front of a sort of a den that looked like a cross between an ash-heap and a wood-yard, disguised as either a grocery or a wine-shop, according to individual taste, and trimmed with cheap cigarette posters. Over it was written, by some one who had St. Vitus' dance and wrote with his left hand, which was paralysed, 'Antonio Ferrati.' I just stood still and stared at it with my mouth open and let those kiddies wreath themselves round my legs like Jack and the Beanstalk. I couldn't have moved at that moment if a mad elephant had happened along.

I pulled myself together in time and made a dart for the door, nearly knocking over a young Lion of Judah who was showing his friends how to use my legs as parallel bars, and carrying off a red-white-and-blue streamer arrangement he had twisted round my ankle. I heard the sort of yell behind me that the Philistines must have set up when Goliath went under, but I hadn't any time to think about that,



because just as I was going to enter the shop an enormous woman, that could have given Buonamici five stone and a beating, enveloped the door from inside and began cursing me in eleven different kinds of Italian all at once. I was so startled that I nearly fell over backwards, and the only words I could think of to pacify her were "Chi si parla Italiano," repeated over and over again like a talisman.

The oddest part of it was that it really seemed to have some effect. At any rate, the cloud of flesh stopped vomiting fire, perhaps because it was out of breath, and just stood there panting, and I saw another woman peering over an edge of it at me as if I was the devil let loose.

"Chi si parla Italiano. Chi si parla Italiano," I kept on saying to let them know I was a harmless foreigner, and not a bailiff or a rent-collector, and I bowed away as hard as I could, with my hat in my hand, until my back ached.

It really was the deuce and all of a situation. It wouldn't have surprised me in the least if the Cloud had sprung at me as soon as she got her breath back. I heard yowlings all round me too, and looking down I saw that the Philistines—or perhaps I ought to say the army of David—had taken me in the rear, and was surging all over my ankles—the queerest collection of sharp, little brown faces and beady black eyes. One of Aaron's direct descendants was grappling my calves as if he were challenging me to a bout under Græco-Roman rules. Crowds of grown-up Israelites were hurrying up as reinforcements, and altogether I began to feel like a terrier that had just drawn a badger unintentionally and

finds his retreat cut off by an army of rats. But it only proved salvation in disguise. Little Aaronson unwound his streamer before I could be lynched ; a passing wagon cut off the reinforcements, and I actually saw signs of a smile beginning to split up the Cloud.

"Chi si parla Italiano," I said. "The mother of baby Williamson. La madre de—oh, damn it. From Miss L'Estrange. Chi si parla Italiano. If you wouldn't mind telling me."

The Cloud rolled away from the door and the other woman looked out. "From Miss L'Estrange, did you say? Oh, please did you say from Miss L'Estrange?" She had her hand over her heart, and her face was all pale under the paint.

It was the mother all right. I knew that by her dress as well as her face. It was bright blue, and just about as tawdry as it could be, all splashed with mud down one side. She had a black helmet hat with an absurd green shaving-brush sticking up from it, and an imitation chinchilla stole and muff that looked as if an ambitious barber had been practising on them, and black cotton gloves, and shoes with enormously high heels and imitation diamond buckles. She had a healthy black eye that some one had tried to doctor up, and her face was painted an awful pinkish purple, and her hair was about the brassiest shade of gold. Not at all the kind of young lady you would care to be seen speaking to in the ordinary way. But the poor little wretch looked so miserable, standing there framed in the blackness of the doorway—you could see the tear-lines quite plainly on the paint, and I

remembered she was an English girl after all, and—damn it, I felt sorry for her.

"Excuse me," I said, bowing away as hard as I could as a sign that I meant well, "but are you baby's mother? Baby Williamson's mother, I mean?"

My heart stood still for a minute. It would have been quite too awful if she had said no, and I had collected the wrong baby after all.

"From Miss L'Estrange, did you say? Oh, please did you say from Miss L'Estrange? From Miss L'Estrange?" She kept on repeating it very much as I had my "*Chi si parla Italiano*"—as something that might keep off the evil eye at a pinch, I suppose.

"On my word of honour, I am. Her brother-in-law. I have had the dickens' own time looking for you."

The black cotton glove went up to the poor little flat chest again. "If you would let me come in for a minute," I said. "I think I have some rather good news for you."

I never saw such eagerness as there was on her face as she stood aside to let me pass. It was like a death's head that had just heard of a vacancy in the heavenly choir. I went in quite gladly, thinking all my troubles were over. They weren't, though. I had hardly put my foot over the threshold when I heard a sort of scuffling in a corner, and before you could say knife an old man jumped up out of nowhere and ran at me with a big cavalry sabre. He didn't actually reach me, because the Cloud suddenly loomed up between us—very much as it used to in the *Iliad*—and gave the old man a friendly cuff that

sent him spinning until he fetched up against the wall, and took the sabre away from him and set him down on a bench, and straightened him up into something that looked vaguely human again—all in one roll as it were. Then it began to smile, yards and yards of it, and a voice came out of it. I couldn't for the life of me reproduce the accent, which was something between Saffron Hill and the Savoy Hotel in August, but I could understand it all right. "It is only Nonno, my husband," it said or words to that effect. "He believed you to be an Austrian."

I was feeling a little shaken, but I managed to mumble something about being delighted to make his acquaintance.

"He has not his senses," went on the Cloud, as if nothing unusual had happened. "He has not been in his right mind this—this thirty years. Have you Nonno?"

The old man nodded as if he quite agreed with her, and said something that sounded like, "No, indeed."

"Tell him you were with Garibaldi," went on the Cloud. "Say you were at Mentana. It will please him. He was wounded there."

I told him I had commanded the right wing—I don't know much about soldiering, but it sounded technical—and that I had been wounded in the left arm, just below the elbow. He seemed so pleased that I went on to say that I had been languishing in an Austrian dungeon ever since, and had only got out by poisoning the gaoler. You never saw such a change as came over the old boy; it beat the young woman to a frazzle. He jumped up from

the bench, just as if he hadn't been dead for a century or so, and began to wave his arm over his head and shout. I couldn't understand the words but there was something about "Italia" and "Tedeschi" in them, so I suppose it was all right.

"He is almost a hundred years old," said the Cloud, in a voice full of proprietary interest. "It would please him if you were to kiss him."

I am always anxious to please, but I felt that I must not neglect my real business. The young woman had sat down at a table by a heap of charcoal in the corner by the door, and she seemed to be crying. I was sorry to disappoint the old man but I hate seeing a woman cry. "About the baby," I began.

"It is very good of Miss L'Estrange," she said, in a voice like the wailings of a lost soul. "It is too late. They have taken my baby."

"The son of my sister is but this moment returned," the Cloud explained, getting ready to shed a few drops of rain. "A man had called with the money and taken Bimba away. Was it not so, Beppo?"

A boy of about fifteen, a handsome little devil, so far as you could see for dirt, turned up at my elbow from under the table I suppose, for there didn't seem room for him anywhere else. He was one of the most artistic pictures of desolation I ever saw.

"A man had called with the money and taken the baby," he said. "It was this morning. Not three hours ago."

"It was this morning. Not three hours ago,"

repeated the Cloud, as if it was something too clever to be missed.

"This morning," the Williamson girl was beginning, but I cut in before her. "Don't you fret about that," I said. "I was the man. The kid is all right. He is—I forget where he—or she—I mean, it, is at the moment—but it's there all right. That's what I came to tell you."

"It is there all right," said the Cloud, who seemed to love playing Greek Chorus. She said it without any kind of expression, as if it were a tuft of grass and she were chewing it.

"It is there all right," said Beppo, with a masterly assumption of tragic joy, though I believe myself that the whole thing was boring him to distraction.

The girl didn't say anything. She just lifted her eyes to me, and I could see the little lines of joy running round her face under the paint, like a Catherine wheel just beginning to go off.

I was feeling a bit embarrassed wondering what to say next, when the Cloud saved me the trouble. First she enveloped the girl and kissed her. Then she did the same to Beppo. Then to me. Then to the old man, who had been miaouwing away to himself in the corner all the time. She had been eating garlic and stale fish and quite a lot of other things.

When I had recovered a bit, I climbed on to the charcoal heap behind the girl's table, where I felt moderately safe, and told her all about it. She repeated everything I said to the Cloud, as if to assure herself that I really was there, and the Cloud

said it all over again to the boy and the extinct volcano, who didn't want to hear it a bit and kept on swearing under his breath all the time.

## CHAPTER XVII

WHEN I had finished my story and was going on to consider the best place for the girl to go with her baby so that she could be sure no one but her friends would know of it, the Cloud started another kissing steeplechase. She got the girl and the boy, who, I suppose, were used to it, but I managed to dodge her. "And now," she said, when she had finished, "we will all go to fetch Bimba—all of us together. And Nonno with us."

I hated spoiling sport, but I couldn't quite see myself trailing over to Jersey City with that combination. I don't know how I put it, but in the end I managed to fix things up so that only she and I and the mother should form the cutting-out expedition; the Cloud, because we could hide behind her if we were attacked by pirates; the mother, because there was no possibility of keeping her out of it; and I because I was the only person who knew where the baby was to be found. I didn't feel so sure of that either after all I had gone through.

One other point wanted a lot of management, though I felt it had to be done—to get the girl to wash her face, I mean. I am not a proud man, and there weren't three people in New York that knew me, but I couldn't fancy myself wandering round any



civilised city in company with a decorative scheme like hers. I managed rather well. I put it all on Inez's shoulders. I said that her last orders to me before going away were that I must get baby's mother some new clothes—not that those she had on weren't altogether first-chop, but so that she shouldn't be recognised by people she didn't want to recognise her. I am half afraid the girl tumbled to it, though I was as diplomatic as I knew how to be, but the Cloud didn't, and she backed me up like the Great Wall of China. Her mother's second cousin, twice removed, was a dealer in ladies' costumes of all ages—or so I understood her to say—and sold everything that the heart of woman could desire. We three would visit her store, which was in the next street, and buy what was wanted, and meanwhile Beppo and Nonno would prepare a slight pránzo to celebrate the occasion.

I went. I felt Inez would have expected it of me—and, curiously enough, the girl knew just how I felt about things without my saying a word. After they had spent an hour or so going over a pile about as big as a house, of some of the fustiest clothes with which mankind ever obscured God's image, she picked out something I might have chosen myself—dark-blue tailor-made, as plain as no matter, and a plain little hat with a single feather; and plain black shoes, things I wouldn't have minded my own sister wearing when they were new. Gave one a new insight into that sort of girl's character, somehow. It wasn't a bit to the Cloud's taste. She would have preferred something tasty in purple and yellow stripes. She held her tongue, though, and I only

found it out by accident. I felt she had been so awfully decent that I should like to show her I appreciated it. I couldn't offer her money, of course, so I suggested that she should honour me by allowing me to beg her acceptance of a hat for herself as some little memento of the extremely auspicious circumstances of our first meeting. There never was such a smile—two miles of it if there was an inch. She hung in the wind a bit at first; thought it might be scarcely proper, and her husband—old Nonno, if you please—might be jealous. You should have seen the way she looked at me sideways as she said it, bashfully nibbling the end of her little finger. It would have moved a corrugated iron roof to tears. Then she plunged right into the middle of things and came up gasping with a hat that would have covered the Serpentine with a foot to spare either way and decorated with more kinds of flowers and brighter than they could have risked in the Garden of Eden without blinding the animals. She wouldn't let go of it for an instant once she had got it, nearly murdered her mother's second cousin by suffocation over a matter of twenty-five cents in the price, and finally wore it all the way home, blocking up the traffic with it as if she had been a Fifth of November Thanksgiving procession.

We had the pranzo in the shop, with half the East Side to cheer us on to it. There weren't any windows or other luxuries like that to interfere with their view—not that anybody seemed to mind that except myself. Couldn't have been a more convenient place, for that matter. If you wanted - garlic bub you only had to lift your hand to whera a garland of them hung over your head. If yo

wanted a bit of stale dried fish there was a gover of it just behind me, and if you wanted a dill pickle—which is what they call gherkins over here—there was a sort of bath of them under the table that kept on splashing over on to my boots.

It was a wonderful spread, considering all things. There was a salad made of capers and anchovies and hard-boiled eggs and salad-oil, and there was an omelet filled with things that looked like tadpoles, and there was ravioli swimming in rancid butter, I think it must have been, and there was cheese that would have turned a bone factory green with envy, and sausages in silver paper that would have made a Dyak head-hunter pale with longing, and macaroni and tomatoes in every possible combination, and several that weren't possible. I couldn't eat much myself because, as I explained, I had just lunched, and, as I didn't explain, the planked shad and the oysters were a little stand-offish. There was wine too, though I have done my best to forget it ever since. And there was the Cloud wreathed in smiles and presided over by the Garden of Eden, and the old gentleman so sunk in oil that he might have been a preserved specimen in a hospital, and Beppo, whose very head swelled with the spaghetti he put away. And there was a paper bundle of what the Cloud called 'Toscani,' limp, black cigars that looked like ladies' hair-curlers. They were, too. The Cloud gave them to me solemnly as a set-off against the hat, I suppose, and she lit one for me herself with her own fair lips, and I had to begin on it. I got rid of it under the table just in time, though. I daresay it gave an added flavour to the dill pickles.

I can't pretend to enthuse over our trip to Jersey City, even now. I suppose the Chinese torture of the thousand sword-cuts would be worse, but I didn't think so at the time. Everybody else was quite happy: that was one comfort. The Cloud took a sausage along in her pocket, in case we might feel faint by the time we had crossed the Hudson. She gave me a flask of what called itself 'Stravecchio Chianti,' with the same idea, but I lost it on the way. When we left, old Nonno, who had got it into his head that we were marching to besiege the Vatican, I think, produced a huge Italian flag from somewhere—it looked as if he had been sleeping in it—and waved it at us until he got quite wrapped round in it, like a red-white-and-green cocoon.

We got there all right, by the Hudson Tube, without starting a riot or anything. I spotted the place first time, and when we got to the top of the steps I felt it was time to put my foot down. The mother wanted to come up to the house with me. The Cloud didn't say anything, but I felt she was much the more dangerous.

"This is what is going to happen," I said, as firmly as I knew how. "I am going off to fetch the baby, and you two will wait for me here. After I have told the woman that its mother is dead, and it is alone in the world, it wouldn't do to have two more mothers turning up unexpectedly. I shall explain that a dear uncle has died, the one I was staying with, and that his widow wants the baby to be present at the funeral. Don't laugh, please. On second thoughts—well, if you can think of anything better, I am listening."

She did laugh outright at that, the first laugh I had seen on her. It improved her face quite a lot. "I think I should say that—that a sister of baby's mother has arrived from the West, having only just heard of the death, and that I insist on taking her away with me. Then it will seem natural that I am with you."

I shook my head. "If you came you would start kissing it, and show you weren't only an aunt, after all. Aunts never kiss babies, except under compulsion. Hate it. really. No; you must wait here with the Cloud—with Mrs. Ferrati, I mean—and I will bring the kiddie to you. It isn't far." I was going to add, "That's one comfort," but I stopped myself in time.

I found the house quite easily, so I need not have worried myself. I knew that we had gone uphill from the station, because I had argued with Mrs. Pash all the way about carrying the kid. And I remembered that at the top we had passed a big chapel or institute of some kind, that dated from the Revolutionary War, or the Civil War, or the Democratic Convention, or something equally venerable, because it wasn't quite finished. The house I was after was three blocks off, the fifth down a side street, and painted a bright purple, with pink trimmings.

The woman—lady, I mean—of the house was out, but her husband was in and more or less awake, and he made no difficulties at all about my carrying off the kid, when he found I didn't want to carry off my three months' deposit as well. The kid was in bed, with two others, but the man seemed to know which was which and generally more about

infants than I did ; and we managed between us to get it more or less dressed, and the things we couldn't find room for we shoved into the stringy little valise. The baby wasn't a bit sleepy, and I think its finger-nails had grown a little.

Alice would have said that the girl wasn't " nice," and, of course, she wasn't, but she *was* fond of her kiddy. As soon as I had given it to her the Cloud very sensibly wrapped itself round me, and we went off for a walk arm-in-arm, as if the one thing that would make life worth living for us was to stare at a huge advertisement-poster at the corner of the next block, that said : " Four million smart young chaps are wearing our ten-dollar ready-to-wear Tuxedo Suitings. Follow the crowd."

On the way the Cloud told me that the girl had turned up outside the Plague-pit at three o'clock in the morning, with a black eye and her clothes torn half off her back. She hadn't been able to give any clear account of what had been happening to her beyond that Dago Frank had quarrelled with another man called Picky Something, whom he had run up against unexpectedly, and Dago had stabbed Picky with a knife and the girl had stabbed Dago with a hatpin, and he had kicked her in the eye while they were all rolling on the sidewalk together, with the crowd cheering them on. Then other people had joined in and guns had gone off, and there must have been quite a healthy breeze of excitement ; and in the general muddle the girl bolted for her life, and had the sense to make for the Cloud's sanctuary.

I gathered, of course, that Mr. Frank was the man Inez had seen in Broadway, and that he was a

friend or partner of the amiable Mrs. Hugo. Whether Mr. Picky was a rival trader or merely a casual acquaintance, was not so clear. He turned up quite at the right time anyway, and on the whole I felt I rather liked him.

What between yammering for her kiddie and declaring that she knew she had been followed, the Williamson girl must have given the Cloud rather a warm time of it. But she behaved like the Temple of Karnak, took her in and did for her and sent round the Fiery Cross to all her pals of the Camorra and the Mafia and the Carbonari and the Black Hand and the other Co-operative Murder Associations on her visiting list. She only did it to please the girl, she explained, because she was quite prepared to hold the Plague-pit against the whole United States Army on her own, if it came to it, and from what I had seen of her, I believe she would have done it too.

We agreed that it would be better to get the girl and her baby away from New York as soon as possible, in case, and the Cloud thought she might be able to fix up something with a nephew of her deceased great-aunt who kept a steam laundry somewhere in the back-blocks of Massachusetts. Meanwhile she promised to look after both of them, and when I said something about her letting me know the expense she was put to, she said that her name was Carlotta and she was a *figlia superba* of the Val d'Arno. Her short way of saying, "I don't think." A jolly old sort the Cloud was. Whenever I was with her I felt like one of Ovid's young men, expecting all the time that the Cloud would dissolve and Venus or Diana or some one

step out of it and propose on the spot. They never did though.

When we got back the girl was still down on her knees on the side-walk, muzzling into the baby's face as if it wasn't shapeless enough already. She didn't see us at first. When she did, she took the kid by both its fat little arms and pretended to make it charge at us like a devouring dragon. Then she made it say by proxy some rot about trying to show her gratitude for all we had done for her, which I didn't listen to.

I don't suppose Alice would have thought much of her; it seemed to me she was wonderfully decent. I let the kid practise opening sardine tins on my eyes all the way back to the East Side.



## CHAPTER XVIII

It was too late when I got back to the hotel to do anything but send off another wire to Inez in Chicago. "Double event. Hercules left at the post," I said. And then I sat down and wrote her a long letter about it.

The next item on the programme was to find Miss Seaton and give her her grandfather's wallet. As I had an address to go upon that seemed nothing after what I had done already. I didn't know the Linworth Building then.

I started off bright and early, by the subway next morning. I wanted to see what it was like, and when I got to the Brooklyn Bridge Station, I wasted quite a lot of time trying to borrow a bit of string to tie my clothes more tightly round me so that I should look decent. I was eleven inches smaller round the waist than when I got into the train. When I had time to look for the Linworth Building, which a policeman told me was on Broadway just opposite, I could only see a bit of it, because a thunderstorm was going on about half way up. But I saw enough to what our burglar friend meant. I had counted a hundred and fifty floors before a policeman moved me on for obstructing the traffic, and there were about thirty or forty more above the thunderstorm.

I made up my mind that the best way would be to start from the top and keep on working down until I struck the right office, if I lived long enough. It meant rather a waste of time at the start, because I went up in what they call an express elevator, and I had to wait at the top while I sent down the nigger boy to find my stomach, which I had mislaid somewhere about the second or third floor. I worked it out that there must be something like four hundred different sets of offices in the building, and allowing four minutes for each I ought to get down to the ground floor a little before two o'clock next afternoon.

I am rather proud now when I think how I stuck to it, because it did begin to grow monotonous after the first thirty or forty calls. I built up a sort of formula by that time. I used to open the door and put my head in deprecatingly and take my hat off and say politely to the first person I saw, "I beg your pardon, but would you be so kind as to tell me if Miss Seaton—Miss Estelle Seaton—is employed here?" Then whoever it was would look up and scowl and say "Nop." Then I would say, "Thank you very much. I am exceedingly sorry to have troubled you," and they would say, "Yup," and I would close the door behind me and start off again. I felt like banging it sometimes.

I forget how many times I drew blank. I know I had got down to the twenty-seventh floor, because just then the offices began to broaden out and there were more of them. The third along the corridor I was in had got "Robert A. Walters Company, Inc." written on it, and when I opened the door there was a big lobby inside with a table and sofa

and things and a little rabbit hutch in the far corner, where a red-haired girl was sitting.

I drifted across to her and put my usual question, and was half-way back to the door again when she pulled me up short. She didn't say "Nop." She said "Yup."

I stood and stared at her. "I beg your pardon," I said. "But did I understand you to say 'Yup'?" "Nop," she said.

I began to thank her as usual when she pulled me up again. "Say," she said, "is it Miss Seaton you want to see?"

I said it all over again in case she might misunderstand. "Then you can't," she said, "because she left a week ago. And who are you anyway?"

She looked so offended that I did not know what to say. "A she-devil, that's what Estelle Seaton is," she said, bouncing out of her seat and coming towards me, as if it was my fault. "And if you are a friend of hers you can tell her I say so. Molly Rooney is my name, if you want to know it."

I didn't at all, but I only said it was very gratifying. She was evidently Irish, and if the worst came to the worst I decided to call myself O'Malley.

"And it's myself that doesn't care that for your Estelle Seaton," went on Miss Rooney, trying to snap her fingers in my face, only as she was very short they only reached to my waistcoat. "Molly Maguire or no Molly Maguire."

"Certainly not," I told her. "Not for a moment."

"It is English you are yourself," she snapped

out, getting more and more furious every minute. "And don't ye be afther denying it."

It hadn't occurred to me to deny it or I daresay I should have. I was just going to call for help instead when a door on the left of the lobby opened and a lady put her head out. I could have kissed her, I was so grateful, but I thought it might offend her too, and I dare not risk it. So I only explained that I had called on the chance of seeing Miss Seaton, but that as I understood she had left I would not intrude.

"I am Miss Barker," she said. "Is there anything I can do for you? Or perhaps you had better see Mr. Walters."

Without waiting for me to answer she went back into the room again. The red-haired girl had gone back to her hutch and was sobbing angrily. I felt I should like to explain that I hadn't insulted her intentionally, so I followed Miss Barker into a room that had one of the most gorgeous views I ever saw in my life.

I always used to think before I met Estelle, that the world would be a much better place if there weren't any women in it, but allowing that there are a necessary evil, the American business woman strikes me as about as useful a type as you need look for. Miss Barker was a good specimen of her. She was about forty, with grizzled hair and gold pincez and the usual white silk shirt-waist—as they call a blouse over here. A thoroughly good sort, in fact without any frills or furbelows and not more femininity than was necessary; you could talk to her as reasonably as if she had been a man. I felt chummy with her from the very beginning.

She was American all right, because, as soon as I said I didn't want Mr. Walters, she started right off with "You are English, of course?"

I told her that I was English and that I thought no end of her country and that I should think even more of it when I had had time to see something of it, and that I didn't know anything about the Presidential Election.

It went off very well indeed, and I felt the atmosphere getting quite balmy. She told me that she was of English descent herself and that her people were a branch of the Heston Barkers of Heston Barker, probably a corruption of Heston Pauca, or possibly of Heston Phoca—because seals often came ashore there—in Northumberland, who had been settled in Peeblesshire before the coming of the Danes and had been among the most prominent supporters of Harold at the battle of Stamford Bridge, I think it was, and had come over to America forty-eight years before the *Mayflower*, and been F.F.V's—whatever that means—ever since. I thought it would interest her, so I told her that Miss Seaton was of English extraction too, only not so old, because her people only fought at Agincourt. That was a mis-cue, as it turned out, because the Barkers fought at Agincourt and didn't remember any Seatons there and didn't believe they were there at all, because it was a Scotch name and connected chiefly with some rather disreputable hangers-on of Mary Queen of Scots. I got out of it all right by saying that the Seatons fought on the French side, through a misunderstanding, and that was one of the things I wanted to see Miss Estelle about. I said I was her brother—I thought that would

prevent any suspicion of scandal—and I had come on purpose.

"I thought you said your name was Talboys," said Miss Barker. I suppose I had, but I had clean forgotten it. "It interested me," she went on, "because there was a Taillebois at the battle of Sluys, where one of my ancestors gained an armorial augmentation."

I said that was so, and that my name used to be Seaton too, only I had married recently. I was a bit worried and not thinking exactly what I did say.

She laughed, and said she had thought it was the other way about and that I was only thinking of getting married in the near future. I was beginning to tell her that was all right, because I was a widow by marriage, but fortunately she interrupted, before I had got too deep, to say that it wasn't any affair of hers, but unfortunately Miss Seaton was no longer one of their staff.

I was just getting up to go with the usual apologies when she stopped me and asked me if I didn't want Miss Seaton's present address. I could see she scented a love-affair, so I looked as confused as I could and twisted one leg round the other and tried to blush into my hat. She studied me for a bit, with her head on one side, and at last said she thought she would be justified in giving me the address. She had always liked her, as they were both of British descent, and she had been sorry when she left.

I couldn't help asking if it had anything to do with the red-haired girl. They had a political argument, she told me, and Miss Seaton boxed the

red-haired girl's ears, and things got so lively generally that one of them had to go, and Miss Seaton offered, though she wasn't at all in the wrong, because the red-haired girl had a father and two brothers to support, and would not be likely to get another place soon because of her temper.

Miss Barker had heard from Miss Seaton only a week before, that she had good prospects of getting a new position at a better salary, and that she was staying at Probityville, Long Island, in the meantime. If I saw her I was to be sure to give her Miss Barker's love, and say that she hoped to be asked to any public ceremony she might be thinking of taking part in. She looked so arch as she said it, and her pince-nez sparkled so, that I was quite dazzled, and instead of getting out my usual little speech I could only thank her no end, and beg her to drop in whenever she was passing, and tell her she really need not send a boy to show me the way to the nearest street-car, as she very kindly offered to.

I felt a bit sore to think how much time I had wasted finding out what I knew already, especially as the only address Miss Barker knew in Probityville was Box Number something at the post office. But after I had had some lunch—it was only half-past eleven, but I felt like it—and sent off a wire to Inez: "Pecked at the water-jump, but going strong," I felt better. I knew that Probityville wasn't far from New York, thanks to the old gentleman, so I started off at once and got there by three in the afternoon.

It was a nice quiet little country town, with one main street running from the railroad depot down

towards the sea about a mile off, and lots of clean, little white frame houses, and a general air of peace and contentment that made me think of Somerset. It had quite a venerable feel about it, except for a beastly new red-brick post-office block that they had just run up in the middle of the main street where it broke into two arms, and a cinema theatre opposite that looked as if it had started life as a farmer's barn, and was sheeted all over like a race-horse, with bluggy pictures of battle, murder, and sudden death, with all the firearms carefully blacked out so that the characters should only look as if they were slinging mud at each other.

The post-office struck me as a good sort of place to start on, so I wandered in and nearly fell over a patriarch in a goatee and a slouch hat who was sitting on a bench by the door, with one leg cocked over the other, staring at his boot as if he was trying to remember where he found it. I didn't know whether the Government might not pay him to do the agreeable, and as I couldn't see anybody behind the wire bird-cage that shut off the office part, I turned to him. He started off like a Dutch clock before I could open my lips. He supposed I was an Englishman. His grandfather came from Camberwell, a village in Surrey county, England. He preferred a Britisher any day to a Dago. He didn't take much stock in Nyark, and America wasn't what it used to be in his young days, and it seemed likely the Democrats would sweep Nassau County, colonel or no colonel; and there was a Russian had taken up old Silas Wedge's homestead way out on the Hemstead pike, and when President Garfield was a boy the South didn't take no stock



in the boll-weevil, and he hadn't any use himself for those automobiles, no, sir. He was giving me a lot more interesting information like that, without any break in it, and I was wondering how long it took him to run down, when another conscript father, who might have been his twin, sailed in from the street with his main-spring wound up to the last notch. He had to let the alarum run for a little; his great-grandmother came from Bristol, England, and you might lay on all the prohibition you cared to, but if a man wanted a drop of rye, or it might be bourbon, he would always know where to get it.

It was rather like an opera, because as soon as each had done his bit of solo they started off together to tell me that Miss Seaton didn't live in Probityville any more, because she was in the city, and had rented her lot to a family from Brooklyn, and was boarding for the summer with old Miss Prosser—not Miss Tom Prosser, because she was dead, and her husband had moved over Good Ground way, nor yet Miss George Prosser, who was living over at Hemstead since last fall, but Miss William Prosser, who farmed a piece on Franklyn Avenue, a mile, or perhaps it might be two miles, out beyond the depot. They started arguing whether Miss Tom Prosser died of grip or just faded away after she lost her little Mame, and as I felt they could settle it without my help I imitated Miss Prosser.

I set out to walk, but it was a beastly hot day, and the road was chiefly dust, and I passed a livery-stable about a hundred yards up the street. I thought I might treat myself to a drive for the credit of England. I think the proprietor must

have been prejudiced against English people, because he never once asked me if I was one, and for all he said to the contrary his parents might have been as American as he was himself. However, he trusted me with a buggy, a noble old relic that looked as if it might have been owned by the doctor who attended Washington's mother at his birth. It had a cover like a four-post bedstead, and curtains, and a horse and a driver, who told me that the horse could do the mile in three minutes if he was put to it. He seemed to prefer walking, though, and the driver sympathised with him, and never spoke to him sharply even when I said I was in a hurry and was paying by the hour. The driver didn't think much more of me than the proprietor had, especially when I told him I had never been farther West than Paterson. He didn't think much of Long Island either, or of anything else except going to California. The only Long Islanders he had any respect for were some Indians whose graves had been dug up somewhere near Probitville. I gathered that the only reason he thought well of them was because they were dead. I was quite glad when we got to Mrs. Prosser's farm before his melancholy goaded him to some rash act.

Miss Seaton certainly had taste, I thought. She had hit upon as pretty a little place as you need look for. It was a sort of island in a big lake of Indian corn-fields that stretched away all round it to a great semicircle of woodlands all aflame with the most gorgeous autumn—I mean fall—tints. There was a quaint old house—wooden of course—quite grown over with creepers and set in a bower of grand old cherry-trees. It was the prettiest place I

had seen in America, and I took it as a good omen.

Miss Seaton was not in, and neither was Mrs. Prosser, but a little girl who seemed to be keeping house told me that Mrs. Prosser had driven over to Hemstead, which seemed to be a local New York, and that Miss Seaton had gone over to Oak Beach to bathe. Oak Beach was somewhere in mid-ocean, and you went to it in a boat that started from a crick, and when you went to it you nearly always stayed till the last boat back, which didn't start till seven. It struck me that I could do with a swim myself and spy out the land at the same time, so I left a message in case I missed her, and got the driver to wake up Pegasus, and we dashed off at three good miles an hour to find the crick.

The boat happened to be just starting, a funny old tub of a motor-boat that made me think Columbus didn't rely altogether on sails. It was a very jolly trip, over a smooth lagoon so shallow that you might have walked most of the way, and the water so clear that you kept wondering why you didn't jolt over the ruts, and glorious air and a glorious clean white sunshine that made you want to sing. I expect I should have, only, for reasons of space, I was sitting in the chief engineer's lap, and he might not have liked it.

It was called Oak Beach, I suppose, because it was an island and had no trees on it—only miles of topping sands and dunes, overgrown with sea-grass that looked as if it liked it, and a huge old barn with a big veranda that called itself an hotel, and a scattering of little wooden bungalows, with plank paths leading from one to the other, and wooden

bathing boxes and a glorious frothing sea outside, over which you could tell the time by Big Ben if only your eyesight was good enough. They were just on the point of shutting the place up for the winter, and there were very few people about, but after a bit I found a sort of bathing-box colony kept by a Swede who had forgotton his own language and never found time to learn any other. I really did sing in my bathing-box while I was undressing. I sang, "Drink to me only with thine eyes," until the sand-flies got to work, and then I sang another tune. Great whoppers they were, with bright green heads and a nasty eye, who just settled down on any unoccupied promontory and dug their teeth in. They were lazy brutes, and it was easy enough to swat them, but that didn't do much good, because a jury of about twelve always came at once to visit the scene of the murder and punish the assassin.

There were only a few people in the water: it was a lot rougher than it looked, and they mostly kept close to the shore, dancing on a rope. There was only one head showing a good way out. I couldn't see at that distance whether it was a man or a woman, and after I had rounded up the others and decided that none of them answered up to the description of Miss Seaton, I thought I would swim out and prospect.

The bathing-box man had fitted me up with a dandy costume, except that it was a shade too big, an Oxford arrangement with a neat little kilt hung around it, the sort of thing a patriotic Highlander would wear in bed on the anniversary of Bannockburn. I felt I should pass muster anywhere outside the fathom limit, and off I set, doing the dog-stroke,

in which I rather fancy myself. It was a nasty choppy sea, and a keen wind snapped the crest off the breakers and slapped you in the face with them. If I hadn't seen from the rise of one that it was a woman, I believe I should have turned back. It was a young woman too, and as pretty as a picture, although her head was tied up in a blue bathing-cap with two peaks sticking up in front like donkey's ears.

I had provided myself with a first-class excuse for speaking to her, about the strength of the ground current making it dangerous to go so far out ; but just as I got within speaking distance a whip-lash of spindrift jumped up and hit me in the eye. It confused me, and before I knew it, I was saying that I believed I had the pleasure of speaking to Miss Fanhope. As if that wasn't idiotic enough I must needs try to bow and take my hat off. Quite a difficult thing to do in anything of a sea, and next thing I knew I was about six feet under water, trying to coax my heels down from heaven.

I finished spluttering before she had finished laughing, which broke the ice a bit, though I could see a sort of wary expression in the corner of one of her eyes. I asked her if I wasn't speaking to Miss Seaton all right that time, and it was her turn to duck. "How do you know my name?" she asked when she came up again ; and when I tell you that she was pretty even then you can get some idea of her beauty. "You aren't Mr. Babbington? But of course not. You are English."

Evidently then, it wasn't the clothes. I had been flattering myself that people took me for English because old Crowley turns me out rather well. I

was just going to ask her how she guessed, when I remembered that we weren't on chaffing terms yet. "I am not Mr. Babbington," I said. "My name is Talboys. Ivo Talboys, and I am English. I have brought you a message from your grandfather."

She didn't duck then, but she opened her eyes, lovely eyes, true blue, not the china kind. "My grandfather," she said. "But I haven't got one."

"If you wouldn't mind coming on shore," I said, "I think I can prove to you that you have."

I wasn't feeling particularly conscious of looking like an ass just then, but I could see it was all she could do not to laugh. "Very well," she said gaily and quite taking me for granted. "Then I will race you back to the shore." And she started off at once, without waiting for me to accept, which meant that she sneaked a good ten yards.

## CHAPTER XIX

THERE is a lot of rot talked about falling in love at first sight, but it isn't every man who can bring it down to within five minutes either way. I can within three. It certainly wasn't more than that between the time I first saw her and when she tried to cheat me out of a fair start.' I couldn't have been in love with her before, naturally, and I certainly was afterwards, because, so far from resenting it, I thought it was quite right and proper. What is more, after the first few strokes, when I found I could swim round and round her, if I wanted to, in a sea like that, it came quite natural to me to let her win. She swam very well, with no end of a powerful breast-stroke, though without much turn of speed. She won by about twenty-five yards—and loved it. I was so blown—or looked it—that I could scarcely get out of the water, and she loved that even more. I had to be blown, because I had to get a moment to think. To fall in love with her and swim races with her and that sort of thing was jolly enough, but it didn't do away with the fact that for all I knew, her grandfather might be lying dead in New York at that moment.

I needn't have worried myself. I was to have plenty of time. After she had caught my hand and helped me to stand up against the backwash of a

big wave, while we laughed as if we were a couple of kiddies, she suddenly stopped and stared at me and began to get red all over. "It—it—you," she stammered. "Oh—how dared you?"

It would be difficult at the best of times to look dignified, standing on the open beach in a bathing suit and a short kilt, with the water cascading, sharp little pebbles over your ankles and between your toes. I was so taken aback that I must have looked a more than usual ass. I thought she had guessed that I had let her win. "But, really, you know," I stammered. "You won quite fairly. Really you did. Honest Injun."

She looked puzzled herself, but what she said puzzled me a lot more. "You—you—then—aren't you—you are the waiter. Of course you are."

I was so stunned that I could only flutter my hands feebly as if they were fins and I was a hydrocephalic herring. "Do I—do I look like a waiter?" I asked her piteously. I had got it into my head that it might be the custom on Long Island for waiters to swim out after you with ices or drinks, and that perhaps she took me for one of them.

She must have thought I was trying to be funny, because her lips quivered a bit and she turned her head away. "You had better wait until I have dressed," she said.

I suppose every man thinks his own wife the most beautiful woman in the world—or did once—or else he wouldn't have married her. But it isn't every man who dare look at his wife, or even his sweetheart, in bathing costume. Personally, I have never come across a bathing-dress that suited a woman wet, especially the hideous American sham-French



variety, with shoes and stockings and the Lord knows how many furbelows all limp and draggle-tailed ; but I can only say that as I watched Estelle walking away from me across the sand, I felt like Balaam's ass after the angel had spoken to it. I don't know how long she was away—she says it takes her half an hour to get her hair alone into shape after bathing ; but when she came back I was still standing there with my toes sunk about two feet in the wet sand and a sort of idiotic grin on my face. She didn't even smile though ; all she said was, " I am ready now. What is it you have to say to me ? "

Naturally I must choose that precise moment to remember that I had left the wallet, with £500 in it, lying loose in the bathing-box for any one to nip off with who felt like it. " If you will excuse me for a moment," I said, only too glad of the excuse, " I will fetch you what I want to say." And off I toddled, as fast as I could go, feeling her eyes burning two holes in my shoulder-blades as I went. She held the odd trick of course—trust a woman, even the dearest for that. She had been wearing shoes and I wasn't, and there was some confoundedly sharp little pebbles lying about, and the places between my toes were full of them already. I must have looked like a Christian martyr walking on burning ploughshares, only less dignified. I paddled along somehow, and got the wallet and my shoes and wrapped a towel round my shoulders and put my hat on and came back with more dignity than I went with. She was still looking puzzled.

" I am sorry I thought you were the waiter," she said apologetically. " I can see you aren't, now."

I told her I was no end glad, but I could not see why she was so sure of it.

She tried not to laugh, but at last she bubbled over like a soda-water bottle when you unwire it too quickly. "Only because you would smash every plate you touched before you had carried it a yard. You haven't any whiskers, either."

I was rather glad I had not been wearing my shoes after all.

"Please forgive me," she said again, after another gurgle. "But you are so like him."

I thanked her. I didn't quite see what else there was for me to say.

She blushed at that. She is perfectly lovely when she blushes. She always is—only more than usually then. "I don't mean that. Not like any waiter. Like one in particular."

I am not a bit given to flashes of intuition, but something told me at once that she meant Basil. We are very like each other, to start with; and if there is one thing I should expect dear old Basil to be, if he was broke, it would be a waiter—a head waiter of course. If he wasn't that he would be a cook. It is a curious instance of genealogy if that is the right name for it—but all the aristocratic side of us has gone to Basil and all the shoemaker side to me. Through our mother we are supposed to be descended from the Emperor Thedosius in the direct line. I don't suppose any one of his descendants was ever so well qualified to play the part as dear old Basil. Even when we were kiddies I always used to think he was like a butler; and I suppose a butler is the nearest thing to a Byzantine Emperor we have nowadays. I don't say he

wouldn't have done as well as a cook. I shall always remember—and all the other fellows in the dormitory will too, I expect—the wonderful messes he used to make over the gas at Harrowby in the old days. One of his invention was a combination of a box of sardines, a loaf of bread, and the cheese out of the dormitory mouse-traps—there were six of them—all held up on a toasting-fork over the gas, so that the oil from the sardines permeated the bread before it was too toasted, and then the bubbly bits of the cheese were scraped off and spread upon it. I don't remember Theodosius' favourite dishes, but I would not mind taking a moderate bet that he never invented anything half so popular as that was, let alone the grand manner in which Basil used to divide it, seeing that all of us got our fair share both of the sardine oil and the cheese bubbles.

I hadn't said so to Inez, because I know she had her own idea of what a peer ought to be; but I had quite made up my mind that if Basil was in New York I should find him in one of the two professions that take themselves seriously nowadays—either a head-waiter or a cordon bleu. I felt more sure of my ground now.

"Would you mind giving me the address?" I said—"the waiter's address? I have wanted to meet him for a long time."

"He is—but then—you are not——?"

"Not at all. He is my brother."

"Did he send—you will find him at Bull's Chop House, on Thirty-fifth Street. I have lunched there several times. How do you know he is your brother?"

"It is really more important to know who you are than who I am. If you wouldn't mind having a look at this." I held out the wallet towards her. "It would tell you who we both are, and lots more as well."

"But it will take hours to read all this. And I really know who I am."

"You think you do," I answered, with a perfectly idiotic grin. I must ask you to remember that my only claims to human dignity at the moment were my hat and my shoes. If you remember Thackeray's very bad drawing of Louis XIV. with and without his robes of office, you will know how I felt. "But you don't, really. It—it is so easy to make mistakes. If—I mean—if you skip—you will be able to get at the gist of it inside of ten minutes."

I took as long as I could over dressing, and when I had finished I spent half-an-hour on a sand-fly hunt. I bagged one hundred and twenty-seven in that time, rather good, I thought. When I had hung it up as long as I decently could, I went back to look for her. She had moved along a bit and found a snug corner among the sand-dunes where the wind couldn't get at her. She was so busy reading that she didn't even look up when I spoke to her, only waved her hand to me as a sign to hold my tongue. I didn't mind, because it gave me the chance to stare at her without seeming rude. I could only see the top of her hat. It was of black straw, with a long orange feather, that made her look like Dick Whittington. Her dress was of blue serge, with a white silk blouse and the sort of jabot arrangement they used to wear in the

eighteenth century. She had tan gloves—only she wasn't wearing them—and tan shoes and stockings. She was half lying down against the sand-dune and was so wonderfully graceful that if she had been an eighth of an inch different either way, she would have been wrong. I stood and stared at her for about half-an-hour as if I had been an Irish terrier looking at the fire, so I know.

She must have felt my eyes on her, because before she had quite finished, she lifted hers. I saw that she was beginning to blush, so I pulled my face away and stared up at the sky as if I was wondering whether any aeroplanes were likely to be passing. I nearly got a stiff neck before I dared look down again, and I should not have even then if I hadn't heard a glorious little trill of laughter come from somewhere near my feet. She was sitting up and holding something out towards me. It was the ring her grandfather mentioned, crest and all complete.

"Am I not to read this?" she asked, holding out a sealed envelope, with Inez's writing on it. I hadn't noticed it before, so I was interested. She had written: "Not to be opened until you see me again."

"I don't know what is in it," I had to say. "But I don't suppose you had better." I wished to goodness I had let her afterwards, as you shall hear.

"Then I have finished," she said, making up the papers into a neat little roll. "And I should like to be alone for a minute or two if you don't mind. I want to think."

I was just going when she stopped me. "Would you mind telling me how you came by this?"

"My sister-in-law——" I was beginning. "Gave it to me."

"Oh! She is Miss L'Estrange, then?"

"That's right. Mrs. Basil Talboys, to be exact. And——"

"And her husband is the waiter?"

"I hope so, I am sure. I have come over to look for him."

"And—and Kitty Something?"

"I have roped her in all right. And the kid too. You needn't worry about them; they are all right."

"You have—already?"

"Pure luck. If you had read what your grandfather said about——"

"I have." She began to laugh again.

"Not overburdened with——"

"But he changed his mind at the end. See here——"

I didn't feel like arguing the point, so I wandered off and left her staring out over the sea. I walked about a hundred yards along and sat down on a tuffet of grass where she could find me when she wanted to, and amused myself throwing pebbles at an old dried-up king-crab about as big as a banjo that was lying about on the beach. I don't know if he was overburdened with brains beforehand; he didn't have many left by the time I had done with him. I hit him four times out of six, and I only wished I had stopped a little nearer her where she could have seen me.

When she came along at last I had just plugged in a glorious shot, right amidships, and it cheered me up as she could scarcely have missed it. She

held out her hand to me and shook mine warmly.

"I am afraid I have been very rude," she said ; "but, of course, it upset me a little. I want to say, right now, that I like you very much, Mr. Talboys, and I am very grateful to you indeed."

She pronounced "very" as if it were spelt "vurry," but I was so far gone by that time that I am not sure I didn't prefer it.

I stood on one toe and goggled like a sick frog. I couldn't say anything.

She waited a bit to give me a chance to say something, I suppose, but I was too busy clinging to her hand and shaking it in case she should want to take it away.

"I haven't ever known any—any young men intimately," she went on, "so if I seem rude to you, or don't treat you as you ought to be treated, you must put it down to that. I have lived with an old lady all my life until——"

"You treat me just as if I was an old lady," I told her. "I shall——"

"But I don't even know how I ought to speak to you. You are a lord's son, aren't you? Ought I to call you 'my lord'?"

She took her hand away as she said that, and I came down from heaven and struck the earth with a dull, hard thump. "Good Lord, no," I said. "People who like me always call me Tuppy."

"Then I shall have to call you Tuppy as well, because I do like you very much."

I fell all round myself trying to say that I should esteem it the greatest honour of a long and glorious career. "The best thing you can do," I finished

up, "is to treat me as if I was an old lady not overburdened with brains and called Tuppy."

She didn't pay much attention. I could see that she was still thinking about what she had just been reading. "You will think me very silly," she said at last, "but it is only because I don't know. Am I anything?"

I was just going to tell her what I thought she was, which would have surprised her, but, fortunately, she interrupted me. "My—my grandfather is—I don't quite know what he is, but he seems to have all sorts of titles. I was wondering if that made me anything."

I wanted badly to tell her that she had the right to be called "Your Imperial Gracefulness" and served on bended knee, but it would only have been found out. "The Fanhopes are no end of an old family," I said.

"That means I am not anything. Old families are as common as—as logan berries with us. Of course it doesn't matter much to you English people, but I should have just loved to be called 'my lady' or 'your ladyship.' They would have appreciated it so much in the village. And now—stand still, please."

I stood still while she straightened out my coat collar, which had got rucked up when I put it on in a hurry. "We must find my grandfather first," she said when she had finished. "If you are ready we will go back to the landing-stage. The five o'clock boat starts in a quarter of an hour."

I was agreeable to anything, but as all I could think of to talk about was how badly I loved her,



and as she was obviously trying to orientate her new position we scarcely said a word until we came to the hotel-barn. "Do you like ice-cream?" she asked me when we got there.

"Old ladies called Tuppy always do," I told her. If it had been a question of carburetted hydrogen I should have said the same thing.

"Wait here for me," she told me, and I waited. She came back with two little cornucopias of vanilla ice done up in wafers. She handed me one. "You mustn't eat it until we are on the boat. I have a small cantelupe here too, and some crackers."

When we went on board she led the way up a doll's staircase to the upper deck—a sort of canopy, so thin that it felt like walking on the top of an open umbrella. The other passengers didn't risk it, so I had her all to myself with a beatific wind blowing her hair all ways at once under her hat and the sparkling blue air throwing reflections up from the water on her face and the big hotels on the distant shore looking like Venice in the sunset. We ate the ice-cream and the biscuits and the melon, which she cut up with a silver knife; she was quite angry with me when I offered to cut it with a steel one, and she wouldn't allow me to eat more than a certain amount of each, because she said it wouldn't be good for me. It was one of those times that you never forget if you live to be a hundred, and the only drawback I found was that I couldn't lie down on the umbrella and offer her my head as a footstool.

When we got to the crick she started off at once up towards the town, without telling me what she meant to do. I trotted along beside her, as happy

as a poodle with a new collar, until we reached a long, low white building with "Goodlake's" written up over it, just before you came to the railroad tracks. "I am going in to take a room for you," she said.

"Am I going to stop here to-night, then?" I had thought I was going back to New York, but she knew best.

She nodded, very decidedly. "It would be too late to make inquiries at the Bowling Green to-night. There is a train at 8.25 in the morning. We will catch that. So you must go to bed early to-night."

I didn't say anything. I was too pleased to find that we were going together. She didn't either; she was too busy making terms for my bed and breakfast with the old lady who received us. First of all she made her promise to get me out of bed in time to catch the train; then she went straight away upstairs to choose my room for me. When she came down she told me it would do very well, and that the bathroom was on the other side of the corridor, and that she had settled with Mrs. Goodlake what I was to pay, and all that before I had found breath to beg her not to trouble herself, because I should do all right.

It was quite dark by the time she had settled everything and came to where I was still standing in the entrance-lobby to tell me that she had arranged with Mrs. Goodlake to let me have some of her husband's night-things and a clean brush and comb. "There is a drug store just opposite," she said. "And they are to send over the first thing and buy you a tooth-brush. And now, good-night,"

and she held out her hand. "I know Mrs. Goodlake will see that you are comfortable."

"But you are not—" I had to stammer a bit to give my courage time to stretch itself. "I am going to see you home."

"Indeed you are not. I can go by myself, quite well."

"It is as black as the inside of a full-blooded negro," I told her.

"Good-night," She held out her hand again. I tried to pretend that I was not trembling with fear, but with determination.

"You really must let me come with you. Please."

She shrugged her shoulders the least bit in the world and smiled. "If I must I suppose I must. But it isn't at all necessary, really."

"Look here," I said, growing bolder as I caught sight of her relenting. "Would you rather I did not come?"

"I—no—I should——"

"Then that is settled."

It was a black lonely road after we had crossed the railway tracks, and I should have been glad not to let her go alone in any case. As things were I was like a kiddy that had just learned the best way to smash a new toy. When we had gone about a quarter of a mile, I began to sing. I was half way through the first verse of "The Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond" before I remembered, and pulled myself up.

"Please forgive me," I said. "I can't help singing when I am happy. I always want to sing. And to skip in the air. And to make little dust-pies and throw them over my head like an elephant."

"You musn't do that," she laughed. "It would dirty all your beautiful clothes. But you may sing. You have rather a nice voice—for an old lady. And skip, if you want to."

"You must sing too, then."

"But I don't suppose we know the same songs."

"Let us sing, 'God save the King.' You can sing that. It is the same tune as your National Anthem."

"It is my National Anthem, sir. Very well."

"One. Two. Three. Go."

We sang four verses of it. We could neither of us remember the words, after the first two lines of the first verse, so we sang "La la la la la-la" and it sounded just as well.

We never met a soul on all that celestial highway, and before we had gone very far the jolly old moon popped his face up over a great blue velvet wood on the right to see who was making all the noise. He got right into our heads at once, and before we knew it we had joined hands and were skipping, or prancing, or leaping, I don't know what you call it exactly—side by side, like a pair of kiddies just let out of school. I don't know how many stars we knocked out of the sky; but when at last we stopped, for sheer lack of breath, she gave me both her hands and we stood there, staring at each other in the moonlight and positively rocking with laughter. I expect we should have looked idiotic enough if there had been any one to see us—and it might have been idiotic enough in some people; but we were just right, and it seemed the most natural thing in the world.

We had only a few yards to go before the grove

of cherry trees loomed up. She stopped again. "Now, mind. You are to go straight home and have your supper, and be in bed by ten. Do you promise?"

"Honest, Injun," I said. And——"

She held out both her hands, quite naturally, so that I could see she didn't think anything of it. "Good-night, Tuppy," she said. "No. I won't call you Tuppy. It isn't nearly nice enough for you. Just good-night."

"Good-night," I began. And then I hesitated.

"You may if you want to," she said laughing.

"Good-night, dear Estelle," I said. It was wonderful how well we understood each other, even then. I knew exactly what she meant. She has told me since that she could have bitten her tongue off after saying it, because, not knowing much about young men, she thought I might have taken it as an invitation to kiss her if I wanted to.

"Good-night, Ivo," she called after me, when I had gone about twenty yards. When I turned she was still standing where I had left her, all glimmering in the moonlight—and she waved her hand to me.

"Good-night, Estelle," I shouted back, and I added "darling" under my breath.

I began to sing "Rule, Britannia" after that, and waved my stick in the air, and went altogether raving mad with happiness, until just in the middle of a wild gambado I nearly ran over a nigger woman as she came out of a side track into the road. She grunted out something about "Lawd, have mussy," and fled back into the darkness again. I quieted down a bit after that.

## CHAPTER XX

I WAS at the depot at eight next morning, and the 8.15 train was there at 8.34 ; Estelle did not turn up until nearly a quarter to nine. The three-quarters of an hour I spent in deciding that she had been taken suddenly sick in the night, that the farmhouse had been burnt down with all hands, and a dozen similar possibilities, each gloomier than the last. It never entered my head that she might simply have overslept herself.

When she did at last hurry over the tracks my fears faded into absurdity, and I made up my mind to meet her with the simple dignity of uncomplaining reproof. I didn't though, because she looked even more adorable than I remembered her, and I could only run forward, lobster-faced with delight, and murmur asinine variations on the theme that I was pleased to see her.

"I am so very sorry," she said. "It is the first time it has ever happened to me."

I told her that I quite understood, that she had been worrying herself with the thought that I might not be comfortable at Goodlake's, and had been kept awake half the night in consequence.

"I expect that was it," she said, smiling. "But don't you think you had better let go of my hand ? We have at least twenty pairs of eyes staring at us, you know."

I hadn't known I was holding it, except by the sense of loss when she drew it away. If you remember that all this happened at nine in the morning, when I was no more than half awake, you can imagine how hard I had been hit.

"The next train is at 9.18," I said, to try and look as if I had been bustling about seeing to things.

"We are not going to New York. I have changed my mind. We are going to drive over to the other side of the island instead."

"Yes," I said; "and when do we start?"

We were on our way up Franklyn Avenue by that time. She stopped then and faced me sternly. "You are a dear, patient thing," she said. "But you mustn't. It is very bad for me."

"What is?" I really wanted to know.

"When I was so shamefully, piggishly late at the depot you never so much as frowned behind your hand at me. If it had been the other way about I shouldn't have forgiven you the whole day. And now, when I say anything, you—you—you just wag your tail."

"That is just what I feel like. I love wagging my tail."

"I don't like it. I don't like saints—they depress me. So if you really are a saint please try to hide it when you are with me."

"I'm not a saint—I'm only a deep schemer. It is like this: I want to make you like me—awfully—more than anybody in the—I mean I want you to like me. So, naturally, I cast about for the best way to do it. And——"

She looked at me with real sorrow in her eyes that brought me up with a jerk. "Then I really

do seem like that to you," she said pitifully. "You think I really am masterful and—dictatorial—and domineering. No, please let me finish. I am not really, not the least bit in the world. It is only because—because I am such a very weak creature, and know it. You could make me do anything you liked if you only tried hard enough. Anybody could—especially if they bullied me. And—and what you think so horrid in me is only my poor little defensive armour. I am like the snail, that has to have a hard shell to live inside if it is ever to get through the world at all."

I was going to make some chaffing reply, about wishing I was a bit of lettuce, or something silly, but I saw that she was really in earnest. So all I said was, "I do understand, really." I did too, because I am rather like that myself, I sometimes think. "And now, won't you tell me why we are going—why you want us to go across the island?"

I was glad I had said that, from the look in her eyes. "It is really almost by accident," she said, as we started along the road again, "I was looking through those papers again last night, and I came across the name of Hertzenstein. I hadn't noticed it before with any attention. I remembered then that Mr. Hertzenstein has a country-house not ten miles from here—over towards Melrose, on the north side of the island. I asked Mrs. Prosser, who knows everything, and she says it was in yesterday's papers that they are down there. So I thought it might save time if we drove over that way and then caught the train to New York at Port Theodore. It would seem quite natural for you to call in there, as my grandfather says you flirted so



desperately with the daughter ; and you could find out if—they know anything of where my grandfather is."

I managed not to show anything, but I didn't like the idea one bit. As I had mentioned to Inez, I had got myself into rather a ridiculous position as regards Miss Hertzenstein. Fortunately, she is the sort of girl who makes a hobby of falling in love, and getting engaged, and breaking it off, and all that sort of thing. My idea had been to keep away from her until she should have the time to get engaged three-deep to other people. I had a good excuse in her father's attitude towards me. On the last day of the voyage he made it quite clear that he didn't want any members of an effete aristocracy hanging around after his daughter. When we said good-bye, he invited me to pay him a visit to Chievely Manor, his place near Melrose, as soon as I could, and stay as long as I liked ; making it fairly obvious that, if I did come, I should find man-traps and spring-guns waiting for me. His daughter, in seconding the invitation, made it equally plain that I had got to come whether I liked it or not. I never believe in dividing a house against itself or setting up a child against its father, so, as I say, I decided to defer that visit until Miss Elvira was married, or near it.

I couldn't very well explain all this to Estelle at the time, though I wished I had afterwards. That she wanted me to go was enough for me, so all I said was that it was a ripping idea, and I was ready to start when she was.

I shan't forget that drive in a hurry. We had the Prosser buggy, with a horse that could do the mile

in two minutes, I think it was. Long Island is full of racing-track champions like that, if you can believe all you hear, though I suppose there is a police regulation that they mustn't travel faster than three miles an hour. They never do at any rate. It was quite a new buggy—not more than fifty or sixty years old at the outside, and it had two seats, which meant that the driver sat in front and I had Estelle all to myself. It was another grand day, and quite hot for the time of year. We jogged along through miles of woodlands, all flaming in the most gorgeous autumn colours and quite putting the sun out of countenance. I suppose they got into my head after a time, because, when we had gone about half-way, and suddenly came out of a patch of woodland on to an open common, I stopped the buggy and told Estelle that I wanted to walk a bit. I didn't really; only to get out of earshot of the driver.

I hadn't in the least expected it; even less perhaps, than she had. When it did come, it was all over and settled in two sentences; about as expeditious an affair as you could want, even in America. She was in tremendous spirits, and as soon as we got down she asked me if I wanted to go birds'-nesting. Then it came.

"It isn't the season," I told her. "I wanted to walk so that I could tell you that I loved you."

"I know," she said. "And I love you."

We calculated that she had begun to love me about ten minutes after I began to love her. It was when she saw me hobbling over the pebbles without any shoes on that she knew it first, because she wanted to run in front of me and clear them out of the way.

She said it laughingly, and then, without a minute's interval, she began to cry. I quite understood ; I felt rather that way myself. There was a bush, with scarlet leaves, growing just beside the road. I don't know what its name is, except that it grows in heaven ; and it was just comfortably big enough for two to hide behind. I won't say all that we said to each other, because it was too sacred, and I daresay too silly, according to the point of view. The only practical moment was when she asked me suddenly : " And you weren't really in love with Miss Hertzstein ? My grandfather seemed to think——"

" Good Lord, no ! " I said. It came out suddenly ; the idea was so out of key with what I was feeling.

She began to talk about ourselves again then, and gave me no further chance for explanations. I can't say I was very keen about them just then.

We must have taken a good long time over what we had to say too, because the first thing that brought us back to the lower earth again was the sound of wheels, and I just got out in time to stop the buggy from trotting back home again. The driver said he thought we must have changed our minds about going. He was a stolid-looking ass, but I didn't feel like arguing with any one just then. I asked him if he could sing instead. He was a curious person ; at first he seemed quite annoyed. When he saw at last that I was in earnest he said he could sing " John Brown's Body." I found Estelle knew it too, and then I told him that would do. First of all we got all the branches we could lay hands on from the bush of Paradise, and any others that were handy, and decorated the buggy with them until it

looked like the wood of Birnam, and then we all sang "John Brown's Body" for half an hour, astonishing the natives as we passed, and after that we arranged the leaves so that they made a serviceable screen, and Estelle and I retired into private life for a time. We told the driver to go on singing, because he had a charming voice and we loved to listen to it. It turned out that he agreed with us, especially about his rendering of a song about an old man called Ned who hadn't any teeth, and he sang that at least twenty times, to all our satisfactions.

I never want to see a prettier little village than Melrose was when we got to it. If it was in France or Scotland it would be a show-place and crowds of Americans would flock over to see it. It was a jolly little white place at the end of a long inlet that runs up from the Sound, with wooded hills tumbling all round it and endless peeps of blue water and white sails through the trees. I fell in love with the place and everything in it except a beastly new clock-tower arrangement that had just been set up in memory of the Jubilee or the Coronation or Bunker Hill or one of Mr. Roosevelt's speeches—I forget which. I didn't mind even that much; I could have found beauty in an ash-heap that day.

We lunched at the Walnut Tree Inn, an imitation coaching place very much older than the real thing would have been. Afterwards we arranged that I should go up to Chievely Manor and spy out the land, and if the General was there, or they knew where he was, I was to come back and report progress in an hour.

She walked part of the way with me, and we had

only just said good-bye—as tenderly as one does for the first time, and I had faithfully promised that I wouldn't get myself killed on the way—when I ran plump up against Miss Hertenstein. She had probably seen us ; we were too busy to notice anything more than two yards off. She was on horseback, and a very pretty picture she made, with her dark eyes and her slim figure, sitting astride and looking as if she had grown there. She had a man with her, one of the square-chinned type of American—a good-looking fellow in his way. Seeing him cheered me up a lot, especially as he didn't look a bit pleased to see me. She had pulled up before I saw her. I was still looking back, waving good-byes to Estelle. She was so elaborately unconscious that I knew she must have seen everything, and on the whole I was glad of it, even if it meant an unpleasant ten minutes in the near future.

“So you have come at last,” she said, bending over her saddle to shake hands. “Earl, this is Mr. Talboys, whom you have heard us talk about.”

I didn't like either the words or the way she said them, but I only bowed to the man, whose name, it seemed, was Hapgood, and was some kind of a lawyer.

Miss Hertenstein was so effusive that I scented danger ahead. I saw where it was coming from a minute or two later. “Earl,” she said, “give Mr. Talboys your horse.” She spoke just as if he was a groom, from which I gathered that he must be pretty sweet on her. “You know the short cut, and he doesn't.”

I should have refused at once, of course, only he

didn't give me any time. "Why, sure," he said, and he was on the ground in about three-quarters of a second. It struck me as being a bit over-generous until I looked at the horse, and that explained it and the sort of half-grin on his face. "Sure you'll be able to manage her?" he asked carelessly. She was a wicked-eyed chestnut, with a worse grin than her master's, and ears that she didn't seem able to keep still.

I rather fancy myself on a horse, as it happened, and I was dying for the chance to punish Miss Hertzenstein by proxy. I looked as nervous as I could, and said that I used to have a Sheltie when I was a kid, and I thought I could manage to stick on somehow if she was very quiet. Hapgood was a bit worried, I thought, but he didn't say anything even when I borrowed his crop and asked him to lend me his spurs, as it would be easier to stick on with them. He wasn't going to, only Miss Hertzenstein nodded to him so sharply that he solemnly unbuckled them and gave them to me without a word.

He wasn't a bad fellow at heart. When I topped up by trying to mount on the wrong side he came forward, and said the mare was a bit skittish with anyone she wasn't used to, and he thought it might be better if I walked.

"Nonsense," said Miss Hertzenstein angrily. "Mr. Talboys had hunted with—the Belvoir, wasn't it? He told me so himself."

"I have often been to the meets," I said. "We always drove though. You can see quite as well."

"Say this thing has gone far enough," said Hapgood as I made another attempt to mount, on the right side for a change. "I'm no murder—"

But by that time I was in the saddle, and the circus had started. I couldn't hear what else he had to say, because the mare started by bucking over a couple of houses that got in the way, and then threw four or five double somersaults, and then bumped my head through the gates of heaven, so that I only missed Saint Peter by a miracle, and then started playing leapfrog over its own nose and generally enjoying itself. I played a few monkey tricks, to encourage Miss Hertenstein, until the brute began to get tired, and then I introduced her to the spurs, and we made a little excursion to Montauk Point, and over the Sound, and up to Albany, and then back by New York and Brooklyn, and so on. Miss Chestnut got tired of it before I did as it happened, and when we got back about five minutes later I was quite sorry for the poor beast. I was jolly glad for myself though, because a little crowd had turned up out of nowhere, and I saw Estelle at the back of it. It made me show off more than I meant to—my experience is that being in love makes you no end of a bounder in that way.

Hapgood was still standing where I had left him, so I thanked him for offering me the mount. I said she was a little too fresh for me, and I was afraid I should fall off and hurt myself, so I wouldn't trouble him after all. He wasn't half a bad sort, as I had suspected; shook my hand quite warmly, and actually wanted to make me a present of the brute, because, he said, I could manage her much better than he could. When I had refused he asked me for my address at New York, because he would like to see more of me. I had an inspiration at that

moment. I told him that I was a waiter at Bull's Chop House on Thirty-Fifth Street, where I should be happy to wait on him with cleanliness, civility, and the best of cuisines at any time he cared to call. Then I lifted my hat, without seeming to notice Miss Hertzstein, and was just walking away when she pulled her horse right across the road in front of me.

"If you will wait a moment," she said, "I will leave my horse at the Walnut Tree, and send down for it later. Then we can all walk up together."

I realised then that if I had had any sort of sense I should have let the chestnut throw me, and so have been rid of my difficulty for good and all, instead of which, by my stupid conceit I had only made things ten times worse. I did the best I could under the circumstances. I was extremely sorry to have interrupted her ride, I told her, but I had a friend with me. I had only intended calling to see if anything was known of Mr. Moresby.

"But he is here. He is stopping with us. He has been here ever since he landed. He is nearly well again."

That staggered me a bit, as it was about the last thing I had expected. I learnt later that they had behaved very decently to him. They insisted, in the first place, on giving him a lift to his hotel in their auto, which is how I came to miss him at the wharf. On the way, he showed signs of having another of his heart attacks, so they took entire charge of him, got their own doctor to him, and ran him straight off to Melrose, sort of prisoner on parole, until he should be all right again. I can't imagine English people of their position taking



all that trouble over a stranger. I must say the Americans are wonderfully decent in that way.

Before I had time to answer, Miss Hertzenstein bent down and put her hand on my shoulder so that she could turn the full candle-power of her eyes on me. "Do come," she said pleadingly, "to show that you forgive me. You were splendid, I can't tell you how I admired you."

I don't mind saying that I liked being flattered in that way ; most men would. But it is easy to be strong when it is impossible to be anything else.

"I am sorry," I said, as coldly as was polite. "I am here with Miss Fanhope, Mr. Moresby's granddaughter." We should hope to call later in the afternoon, I went on, when, if she was returned from her ride, we should perhaps have the pleasure of seeing her.

I left her on that note, uncommonly glad to have had the strength of mind to be rude, but with an uneasy doubt all the time whether I might not have made things worse instead of better.

I certainly had in one way, it turned out. I expected that Estelle would have been jolly glad I had come through so well. She wasn't a bit. She was just furious. She was actually white with anger and trembling all over, and after about her third sentence she burst out crying. I couldn't make out what the trouble was at first, she was so incoherent. It seemed that first I had disgraced myself by showing off before "that woman," and secondly I had behaved like a brute in ill-treating the poor horse and bringing it back all covered with foam and trembling. It never seemed to worry her a bit that the poor horse would have broken my neck if I

had given it the least chance—and it wasn't my place to remind her of it. The queerest part of it was that she kept on saying, "How dared you? How dared you?" as if it had all been some childish prank that I had insisted on playing after she told me not to. I got a little huffed myself in the end at being treated like a naughty schoolboy.

"After all," I told her, as mildly as you would when you were in love, "I really can't see that I have done anything very dreadful. I am sorry you are offended, but——"

"How dare you say that? How dare you? I am not——"

I had better have held my tongue, but one never learns these things until it is too late. "There is really no reason to get into such a state," I began.

"Oh—Go! Go! Go!" she rapped out with a stamp of her foot that showed she meant business.

"Of course I'll go, if you wish it. But——"

"I do wish it. I never want to see your face again. Go, I tell you——"

The trolley line to New York ran along the road just outside the inn, and by bad luck a city-bound car happened to come along just at that minute. "Very well," I said, thinking of course that she would stop me. "I will catch that car, if you feel like that."

She didn't attempt to stop me. She only clasped her hands and looked up at the ceiling as if she wondered why it didn't come down on my head. I bowed coldly—I was getting quite adept at bowing coldly—and walked out of the room, very slowly indeed, so that she could have plenty of time to call me back. She didn't. I thought

had timed things nicely, so as just to miss the car by little enough to look as if I didn't want to. Of course the beastly thing waited for me.

There was no chance of getting out before the abomination chose to stop at its regular halting-place—about a three days' run, it seemed to me. When it did I sprinted back to Melrose as hard as I could go. When I got to the inn she had been gone, buggy and all, for ten minutes.

By that time I was half out of my mind, and nothing would suit me but to go chasing up to the Hertensteins' house. I had just sense enough left to ask for the short cut. It began with a little by-lane off the main road and then cut straight away uphill through the woods. I went up it as if I were climbing the greasy pole, one step upwards to two down, and when I did at last get to the top I was absolutely winded. The path ended at a plantation, and beyond it was a broad lawn, that would have done credit to an English park, and beyond that, at the very top of the hill, the Manor House. A fine old house it was, in what they call here the Colonial style, with a great Ionic portico fronting it, about as undemocratic a place as ever I saw.

A rustic gate divided the plantation from the wood I had come through, and I waited by it a bit to get my breath and settle my looks into something a little less like an escaped lunatic. Then, as I didn't want to show myself too soon, I followed a path that led through the plantation towards the house. I was still about fifty yards from the end when I heard women's voices coming towards me, and something made me slip behind an old wooden

arbour at a place where the trees had been cut back a bit to give a view across the Sound. I peeped round it, through some branches that made a convenient screen. Estelle and Miss Hertenstein were coming towards me, both with their chins up in the air, breathing hard and looking at each other sideways, as though they were going to fight a duel. They stopped just before the arbour, and Miss Hertenstein turned so as to face Estelle. "This will do," she said. "No one is likely to overhear us here."

"I don't care whether they do or not," said Estelle angrily. I wanted to call out and warn her that you must always keep your temper when you lose it; but of course I couldn't. I learnt later that she had started the whole thing herself, which made it all the more necessary.

I can't very well give any particulars of their discussion, because I wasn't supposed to hear it—and wish to goodness I hadn't. I gathered that they were making some pretence to look at the orangery or the pheasantry or the Italian garden or something, while the General was getting his things together. Estelle's real purpose was to warn Miss Hertenstein to keep off the grass, and Miss Hertenstein didn't seem to see it. It was one of the most alarming spectacles I ever assisted at; they were so infinitely more in earnest than men would have been. I suppose that as they were sure no one could overhear them they felt they could let themselves go. The queerest thing about it all—or so it struck me—was that they both treated the thing they were quarrelling over as if he was a sort of wooden doll without any preferences of his own,

who would do exactly what he was told they had decided for him. But all that is neither here nor there, and the only reason I mention the matter at all is that in the middle of things Miss Hertzenstein casually mentioned that she was engaged to me and that the only reason it had not been publicly announced was that her father disapproved of me. By the time I had recovered they had both walked up the path again side by side, and I could see them as they crossed the lawn pretending to show each other flowers and views and things and looking as if they couldn't love each other dearly enough. I was able to sit down on the ground then for a bit and gasp.

It was quite clear I couldn't go up to the house then—I hadn't the pluck to, for one thing; yet I couldn't let Estelle go without seeing her again and telling her—without seeing her again I mean. I made up my mind at last that the only thing was to hang about the main entrance gate, on the Port Theodore road, until the buggy came out.

I had to wait more than an hour, expecting to be run in at any moment as a potential burglar, and yet not daring to leave my post for a moment. At last the gate opened and the buggy came out all right, the old gentleman in my former seat, positively beaming and looking as fit as a fiddle again, which pleased me.

The driver pulled up when he saw me, and I thought the best thing was to go up at once and congratulate Mr. Moresby on his looks. He was as friendly as possible, and made a regular set speech, thanking me for all the trouble I had taken. I smiled away as gratefully as I could, but all the

time I was watching his grand-daughter's face and trembling inwardly. She was smiling too, the regular conventional smile that means nothing, and when her grandfather had finished she turned to him with a laugh.

"You haven't congratulated Mr. Talboys yet," she reminded him.

I don't know about being overburdened with brains, but it never seemed to enter his chuckle-head that anything was wrong. He turned to me again, beaming more than ever.

"I had actually forgotten," he said, with as idiotic a grin as you need look for on a summer's day. "We have only just heard that we are to congratulate you," he piped. "A most charming young lady. You are a very fortunate young man indeed."

"But—really you know," I was beginning, thinking I saw something in the way of an opening, but Estelle cut me short in the middle.

"It is selfish of us to keep him," she said. "Miss Hertzenstein is waiting for him."

They started off at that, both bowing and smiling, and left me standing there with my mouth open.

## CHAPTER XXI

I GOT to Thirty-fifth Street a little after seven, and, Basil or no Basil, I felt that I deserved my dinner. Bull's English Chop House, as it called itself on a big sign-board, hung out in front, had recently been rebuilt in the very newest style of antiquity, with wooden crossbeams and bull's-eye windows and what looked like a thatched roof, though I heard afterwards it was made of some kind of metal shavings that looked the same and wear better. It was the same inside ; everything as old as new paint could make it, and furnished with the very latest ideas in monks' clocks, and grandfathers' chairs and gate-legged tables, and red-tiled floors covered with imitation anti-septic sawdust, and churchwarden pipes, and modern prints of old coaching scenes, and huge old fireplaces with iron firedogs, and great Yulelogs that were very much too lifelike to be real. Even the electric lights were made to look as much like farthing rushlights as possible, and the newest of the tables had the marks of whole generations of wet tankards carefully painted on their varnish.

A bell-boy showed me into a big room on the first floor where there was only one vacant table, in a beastly place by the door. It didn't worry me much though ; I was too much interested in dear

old Basil's shoulders. He had his back to me, and he seemed to have got fatter, but I would have spotted them anywhere. He was bending over a table at a far end of the room, taking an order.

I walked up to him and touched him on the shoulder and called him by his name. He straightened up with a start and looked round, and it was Basil all right, except that he had shaved off his moustache and started a most preposterous pair of whiskers. He looked really pleased for a moment, and then his lips closed together like a mouse-trap, in a way I had never seen in him before.

"A table, sir?" he asked. "Yessir. Badger, show the gentleman a table."

"But, Basil," I began. He just turned his back on me and bent down over the table again. I felt I had put my foot in it badly.

He came over to me a few minutes later, when another waiter was taking my order. I noticed that the other man seemed positively afraid of him and nearly dropped a glass he was fiddling with at the time. Basil didn't say anything, just stood by like a jolly old statue of impeccability until the man had gone. Then he produced a wine-list out of nowhere and handed it to me with a flourish, opened at the champagnes. "Sorry, old man," he said under his breath, bending over me as if he was advising me which to choose. "Business and family life don't mix. I shall be off duty in half an hour."

I had half thought he meant to cut me altogether, and after what I had been through that afternoon I believe I should have cried. I suppose he saw I was pleased, because he started his official voice



again. "Yessir. I can recommend it thoroughly. Our own importing, sir. Yessir. Thank you, sir. Bates, a half of '57 for the gentleman. Have the chill taken off, sir? Yessir. Thank you, sir."

It had never struck me somehow to look for dignity in the average waiter, but old Basil might have been an Archbishop in partibus. I just sat and stared at him as he moved about the room, so that I could scarcely get through my dinner, badly as I wanted it. He came up once or twice to ask if everything was satisfactory, and when I told him it was all first chop he made me quite a little speech about it, how they always welcomed the commendation of discerning patrons and hoped that as long as I remained in their city they might enjoy my continued patronage, when I could rest assured that every attention would be paid to my comfort. He larded it with such a lot of "Yessirs" that I wanted to laugh outright, only he looksd so portentously solemn. He seemed to me to have changed; his face was ever so much grimmer than it used to be. Of course he had suffered a lot—I was just beginning to have some idea of what it meant myself—and, of course, he must have worked like a Trojan horse to have got where he was in the time. I thought at first he was only an ordinary waiter, but I soon saw by the respect the others paid him that he must be head, if not manager.

He drifted away after a bit, and I thought he had gone for good, but he brought me my bill himself when I asked the other man for it and pretty stiff it was. I asked him, as a joke, what was the proper scale of tips in New York. He took it quite seriously; said that ten per cent. of the bill was

considered ample, although it varied according to the class of establishment. When I gave him just double he thanked me with a dignified deference that nearly sent me off into a fit of giggles, though he seemed to be perfectly serious.

He hadn't told me what to do next, so I hung it up over my coffee a bit, and after a time a bell-boy happened along and asked me to follow him. He took me to a little room furnished like an office, on the second floor, where Basil was waiting for me. He had taken off the number on his coat and was smoking a fat cigar. His manner was changed no end; he quite came running towards the door. "My dear old Tuppy," he said—and then I knew it was all right.

We gabbled about nothing for a minute or two just to work the steam off, and then I got down to business.

"So Bacchus has mounted his barrel after all?" I asked him, laughing. We used to call him Bacchus at Harrowby, because he was supposed to have a taste for sausage-rolls and ginger-beer more than common. "Making his fortune by rolling it too, I suppose,"

"I haven't done badly, Ivo," he said gravely. "I have been very fortunate."

I could see he was depressed about something, so I felt I wouldn't tell him about our father's illness at once. "What are you exactly?" I asked him. "Head cook and bottle-washer, or what? You are getting fat on it, anyway. And oh, Bacchus, why those awful whiskers?"

He fingered them absently, as if he were thinking about something else. "I own this place," he

said. "And two others. As to the whiskers, they are only temporary adornments, Tuppy, a business uniform. I am just opening a new place on Seventh Avenue. Another of my National string. It is to be French. All the best French waiters wear whiskers."

"Opening another one," I said. "Are you a millionaire, or what?"

He didn't answer that, and I could see that he was still thinking about something else. I felt it wasn't any good waiting. "I hope you have got a good manager, Basil," I said gravely. "Because you will have to give up looking after things yourself for a time. Do you know why I am here?"

"I suppose I can guess."

"To trot you off home as fast as a boat can take us. He is pretty near the end now. And he wants you." We always called our father He. Affectionately, I mean, of course. We all loved him, except perhaps Alice, and I daresay she did in her way.

"I'm afraid he doesn't, Ivo." He said it so sadly that I was quite startled. "Rot," I said. "Don't be a silly ass. He is always asking for you. And for Inez too. He never believed the lies they told about you, any more than I did. I tell you he wants you. And you have got to come."

He looked up at me. "He will never want either of us again, Ivo. They buried him this morning."

I couldn't believe it at first. I was fond of my father, and when I took it in it broke me up for a bit. Basil was very good to me. A brother is sometimes a better investment than we always realise.

When I pulled myself together a bit he told me how he heard of it. It was while he was snatching a moment for some lunch. He picked up a newspaper, and the first thing he saw was a paragraph about our father. He went on with his work just as usual afterwards. Said he thought he would have liked it best. I expect he was right, though I couldn't have done it myself.

I asked him, of course, to show me the paper, but he would not. He reminded me that the New York press isn't run on the same lines as ours are at home. They had said things about our father and his career, and about us as well, that weren't either kind or true. He said it would only hurt me to read them and not do any good to anyone, and the best thing to do was to think no more about it. He said that to contradict the stories or make any fuss about them would only stir up more scandal, and that our father suffered enough in this world to have earned a quiet grave for himself.

He made me see it in his way at last, and so I never knew exactly what the rag did say. We started talking about other things and especially about the question of going home. To my surprise, though it was natural enough, Basil wouldn't hear of it. "There is nothing to take me back now," he said. "It is too late. He will understand just as well now, wherever I am."

"But apart from that," I reminded him, "there are lots of business things that you must see to. You are a peer of the realm now."

He laughed. "Nominally perhaps. But actually I am a New York restaurateur, and an American citizen. And they don't exactly match, somehow."

I just goggled at him. "You—an American. But you can't be. It——"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Then the impossible is happening. You aren't going back either, if I can help it."

"And what about the money that was to come to us. It isn't much, I know; but five or six hundred a year is something these hard times. And even my little bit—two hundred, isn't it?—is worth something. Do you propose that Alice should have the lot?"

"I have attended to that already. Drafted out a letter to Salesby the lawyer this afternoon. I am giving that up—to his creditors. And so are you."

"Really! It's the first I've heard of it. And what about your own creditors? And mine?"

He began to tap the lobe of his ear with his forefinger as he always does when he is in earnest about anything. "I am arranging for them to be paid off too, in time. It is like this. There is something like a quarter of a million to be found before the name is clear again. We can't manage that, or anything like it, for years. But if we give up all we have we shall have done our best for his memory. And in time, if things go on with me as they are going, we may be able to clear it all up."

The idea of Basil worrying himself about his own or anyone else's creditors was so novel to me that I thought he must be joking.

"It will drive Alice half crazy," I reflected aloud. "That is something in its favour." I was not feeling pleased with Alice. She might at least have

taken the trouble to send me a cable, I thought. As a matter of fact one was waiting for me at the hotel, but of course I didn't know that.

"We shan't starve, either. Not by a long way," went on Basil.

"You won't," I reminded him. I still was not sure whether he meant what he said. I think it must have been the last time I saw him before he came over here that I said something about being sorry he was so worried about his debts. He pretty nearly laughed outright. "Worried," he said. "What has put that into your head? Let my creditors worry, if they like. They have lots more reason to." So you can imagine that his change of front was a little confusing at first.

"Neither will you," he went on. "Of course I couldn't ask you to consent to such a sacrifice without making you some sort of a return for it. You are coming in as my partner in this."

"Am I?"

"It isn't a new idea either. I have been meaning to ask you for some time past, only I wanted to be sure first it would be worth your while. It will mean something like ten thousand a year to you at first, only dollars of course. But I expect it is more than you are making now—since the Copper Queen turned you down anyway."

I leapt out of my chair. "What's that you say? Miss Hertzstein? Turned me down? When did you hear that?"

He was grinning, his old original grin. "There was a lot about it in the last edition of the *Evening Phone*. 'Interview with Mr. Hertzstein: His Opinion on Penniless Aristocrats,' and so on.

There will be more to-morrow, especially after the other——” He gave a little shiver of disgust.

“It is only the old man, then?” My new hope died down as quickly as it had caught, and then, as a new idea entered my head: “My goodness, and she will read all about it.”

“Probably wrote it herself,” said Basil, with another asinine grin.

“Not her, you infernal idiot; someone else.” And then, as the full meaning of it came over me: “Oh, ten million slack-baked devils!” I burst out.

Basil has certainly improved no end. At one time he would have gone on making one idiotic remark after the other. As it was he simply changed the subject.

“Well, will you come in with me?”

“It is no end good of you, old man,” I said, when I had collected my wits a bit, “but I couldn’t do it.”

“And why not, pray?” He was beginning to flare up, as he always did when you contradicted him. I played for safety.

“No end sorry, but I really couldn’t wear whiskers like that.”

He laughed. “You needn’t. You shall run the Cockie Leekie House I am thinking of opening, and dye your hair red and wear a kilt. How will that suit you?”

“That’s all right,” I said soothingly; “but what do you imagine Inez will say to your giving away half her income?”

I said it purposely, but I was beastly sorry the next moment. He went quite green, and looked as

if he was going to faint. "We need not discuss my wife," he managed to splutter out.

As we were both feeling a bit shaken, I suggested after a bit that he should stroll round to the Waldorf with me and get a breath of fresh air. He jumped at the idea, and while we walked he kept on laying down the law about what we were going to do together in a strange new damn-your-eyes-you've-got-to-do-what-you're-told sort of way that quite startled me. It wasn't the old don't-care-a-damn-whether-I-do-it-or-not Basil one bit. It came out strongest when we went into the hotel and I asked him to have a drink with me.

"No, sir," he said, "I am riding on the water-wagon now, if you know what that means. And you are going to join me before you are a week older."

Naturally, I knew why he felt like that, and I was jolly glad to hear it, though I didn't quite see why he should want me to suffer for his past mistakes. I held my tongue, though.

I found Alice's cable waiting for me, as I have said, and with it was another. It read: "Deeply grieved to read of your great sorrow. I do associate myself with you both in bearing it.—INEZ TALBOYS."

I handed it to Basil without comment, and just for a moment after he had read it his face lighted up as mine would have done if Estelle had suddenly turned up and kissed me unexpectedly. Then he went his favourite dull green again.

"Signed Talboys, you see," I reminded him, to fix the good impression more firmly.

"Yes," he said bitterly, "she hasn't forgotten the peerage part of it."



I was an awful ass not to realise why he said it and how it wasn't really caddish at all, whatever it seemed. Whether or no, I went for him, told him he was a cad and a coward and a few more little things like that, and that he had deserved all he got, and if he had had the slightest decency he would have cut his throat two years ago. Our nerves were both dancing on knife-edges, of course. He told me a few home-truths of the same kind, and I told him if he jolly well didn't take them back I would jolly well ram them along with his lying teeth down his lying throat, and altogether things began to get brief, bright, and brotherly, and there would probably have been quite a healthy riot if the other people hadn't begun to get up and stare at us.

He went off at last in a wild paddy, swearing that he would be everlastingly confounded if he ever again polluted his lips by speaking to such a low-down, insolent, blackguardly young cub again. After he had gone I sat down and wrote three letters to Alice and five to Inez and a round dozen to Estelle and tore them all up and went off to bed and slept like a lamb.

## PART VI

### BASIL'S NARRATIVE

#### CHAPTER XXII

ACCORDING to Ivo, I have grown thirty years older in as many months. I cannot be sure of that ; at least I know that I changed from a young man into an old one in the time it takes a woman to say a sentence of ten words.

We often say lightly that we shall never forget something as long a we live. It is nearly three years since that moment, but I can picture the smallest detail as though I had just come away from it. I could even pick the policeman out of a thousand who caught at my arm as I crossed the road and saved me from going under a street-car. We stood on the corner of the street, opposite Macey's, by the entrance to the Greenwich Bank. If I shut my eyes I can still see the figures of the people who passed in and out as we stood there and the hot black shadows they threw in the sunlight on the steps, and hear the roar of the trains that passed on the Elevated. I know very well what Queen Mary felt when she said that after her death the name Calais would be found branded on her heart.

The shape of the quays and the outline of the battlements and the sparkle of the water in the harbour would have been found there too, I think.

It is still so horrible a memory to me that a hundred times I would have crushed it out, as perhaps I might, with a strong effort of will. But I have not that strength, for it is all that I have left of her, the last glimpse that I had of her dear face before it vanished for ever in the crowd.

I woke very late that morning. We were living—so to call it—in a horrible, cheap hall-room on West Eighteenth Street. I had been half drunk overnight. Not really drunk; I was too cunning, or cautious, call it what you will, for that. I was never drunk, never so drunk that I had not control over myself. I was so secret that I never even entered the same saloon twice in one day, lest the bar-tender should notice me. I used all kinds of tricks to mask the smell of my breath that none—she above all—should have any suspicion. I have heard since that it was known—at least suspected—even the poor little Williamson girl seems to have known of it, and to have wished me dead for her sake.

There was no excuse for me—none whatever. It came through the battle in me between self-indulgence and false pride. Not that I ever drank to excess before that terrible year.

I was very miserable at the time. So much I can say for myself. It was in no way through her or because of her or blamable to her. She was tired of me, anxious to escape from me—God knows she had reason. But she was always patient and very

long-suffering. I marvel sometimes that she had strength to bear with me as long as she did.

In some way even Ivo seems to have guessed the truth about my leaving England. It was due purely to mad, selfish, unreasoning jealousy. If I could I would have taken her to some absolute desert where we should have been absolutely alone, where not another living creature could have spoken to her, have drawn her thoughts away from me, even for a moment. I suppose I was actually insane ; I cannot explain it any other way. It was for that reason and for that only that I brought her here, that she might be in a place where she could know no one but me. No doubt too, I thought I should be able to shine before her, more than I had ever done in England.

I came to America, filled with that snobbery of nationality which is of all the most senseless and the most offensive. As do so many Englishman of my idiotic kind, I thought—if I thought about it at all—that I had but to show myself to be accepted as a superior being, conferring a favour by my very presence. I had nothing behind me, no trade, no capital, worse than no influence, for the notoriety of my poor father's financial misadventures was not confined to one side of the Atlantic. Of myself I was nothing ; moderately clever perhaps, with a public-school education, some idea of how to enter a drawing-room and, of course, a firm belief in my star. That I had never been able even to approach the making of my own living in London was, I suppose I thought, a certain passport to success in New York.

To my amazement I found that New York was

perfectly well able to exist without my help. Instead of a pale Bæotian reflection, living by the light of London, I found myself in a place where London was several thousands of miles away, and of little more importance than it would look seen from that distance. America actually had a life, a tradition, a nationality of its own, and one which obstinately refused to adapt itself to mine.

We brought with us one or two introductions from Inez's friends. I had been too idiotically proud to ask for any on my own account. I think my main idea had been to stay in America for a month or two, to make a huge fortune by sharpening my keen wits against the dulness of the natives and to return in a blaze of glory. I presented my introductions; I was asked to dinner to two or three houses, but that was all. My hosts showed no desire to kiss the ground I walked on. I imagine that they disliked me cordially; I am quite sure they were right. I had, as of course we all do, always regarded the "foreigner" with the gentle tolerance of accepted superiority; I suddenly began to realise—and I cannot describe the disturbance of that discovery—that in a city with so English-sounding a name, I was, after all, no more than a "poor foreigner." Ivo I know, differs from me in this. He says that he was at home in New York from the very first. But he never had a quarter of my conceit, insular and personal.

When we first arrived we stopped at the best hotels. Personally I believe I should have continued to stay there until, unable to pay my bills, I had been arrested, very properly as a swindler. Inez, who was, whenever I allowed it, my better angel,

induced me, as the weeks passed, our small capital decreased, and the anticipated millions tarried, to seek something humbler, and thenceforward our downfall was rapid until we reached the hall-room in West Eighteenth Street. All that time I cannot express how very long-suffering, how very patient she was with me. I think for one thing that although she never cared for me very much—and had never any reason to—for it is not in her nature to lavish herself upon any outside object—she realised how passionately I loved her. It sounds hypocritical enough, I know—it must certainly have seemed so to her—for a man to talk of passionately loving a woman and at the same time for him to take no care for her welfare, to drag her down to the lowest depths of poverty and anxiety, to be even content to live upon her poor earnings. Yet so it was with me. I think my love for her somehow paralysed me. I was so desperate, so absorbingly anxious to hold her love ; I was watching so closely and so fearfully for any sign that she cared for me no longer ; I was so hideously and absurdly jealous of every other man—or woman or child for that matter—she spoke to or seemed interested in, that I had no thought or ability or energy for the outside things of life.

I used to deceive her, day after day, about the actual position of things. I condescended at last to look for work, instead of waiting for it to come to me. Thereafter, if I found the faintest chance of it, it became in the telling a definite offer with a handsome salary attached to it. If I managed to borrow a few dollars, usually by some pretext that came very near to swindling—for I was so desperate

I believe I should have stopped at nothing—I would take it to her with some lying story of the work I had done to earn it; and then, as like as not, borrowed half of it back from her again. I knew in my heart that I was paving the way to certain ruin, yet so besotted was I, and so sure that something would turn up—for not Mr. Micawber was a more incurable optimist than was I in those days—that I do not believe an angel in heaven could have turned me from the path I had chosen. I was so set upon raising the cloud of anxiety from her dear eyes, if but for a moment or two, that I cared nothing for the risk of her permanent misery.

When I had a little money I squandered it—on her, of course, though that is no excuse. She is naturally almost as quick to forget anxiety as am I myself. We used to set off together, as soon as I had quieted her fears by some ingenious lie, to buy her some trinket, to have dinner at some decent restaurant, to go to some theatre, to spend a day or two on some little excursion. I was happy then—really happy: I had always that fatal facility for shutting my eyes on the future. We would make little excursions into the country or steamer trips along the coast—the sun knew how to shine in those days. I would lavish on one such pleasure-trip as much as would have kept us for a month, properly expended. I used to think the risk well taken when I saw the sunlight driving back the anxious shadows from her face and hear her laugh, as bright and merry as in the days before the wolf came to live on our doorstep.

Things drove on in this way until all my small

capital was gone. Poor Inez did what she could. She had been trained as a singer, though she had never worked at it professionally. She gave singing and French lessons. For a time she had a small post as companion to an old lady. She used to read to her, sermons—poor Inez! by the hour together. She tried, so hard, after engagements on the concert platform. She even taught herself stenography and typewriting in the hope to make a little money—to keep her wretched husband.

Climbing my pyramid of deceit, I was driven at last to invent a post for myself, with a firm of stockbrokers, in Maiden Lane. I did the thing thoroughly—as cunningly as would the madman that I was. I invented the whole machinery of an office, my employers, my colleagues, the work I had to do, the way my time was employed—everything. She believed it all, poor girl—and was happy. I should not be paid, I told her at the beginning, until the end of the month, so for thirty days I had a respite. I told her that my salary was fifty dollars a week. I might as well do the thing handsomely, I argued. We began at once to make plans for the little home we were to start, how economical we should be, how we should always save a little every week. We used to go—oh, my God!—and look into the windows of the cheap furniture stores and choose the things we should buy when the money came, and we used to take little trips to the suburbs to choose our house, and we used to spend the evenings in that awful hall-room working out schemes of expenditure on paper.

I had written to Ivo some time before, begging him to lend me fifty pounds, or if he could not lend



it himself, to beg or borrow or steal it from some one else, because my need was very sore. But after the smash people had been very chary of financial dealings with us or any of us, and, although, I knew he did his best—he had never failed me before—he failed. He sent me five pounds, which was all he had—and I spent most of it on standing Inez dinner and a theatre, with some lie about having earned it as advance commission.

After that I suppose I descended as low as ever man did before me. I wrote letters—actual begging letters—to everybody I could think of that I had ever known. I wrote to a woman that I had known before I met Inez, and had treated very badly—Inez knew of her, though not of that—and she sent me ten pounds. We are curious creatures. Degraded as I was, I could not spend that money on myself. I bought Inez a new dress with it, and smiled forgivingly when she rated me for my extravagance.

Inez never knew that my wonderful post in Maiden Lane was an invention. The crash came before that. I have always been rather glad of it. I do not know why.

The night before I was to draw my salary I suppose I must have drunk nearly a bottle of whisky, in the vain hope of shutting out the morrow, or perhaps of jogging my invention for some reason why I had not got my salary when the time came. When I woke at last Inez was already up, sitting by the window—it looked on to a horrible piece of waste land, I remember—sewing something. Her beautiful neck and arms were bare—I can see the light playing on them now—and her head was bent.

When I spoke to her, and she looked round, I could see that she had been crying; I was too cowardly to ask why.

I dressed in a hurry, pretending to fear that I was late for my work. She was very quiet, scarcely spoke to me, only gave me my coffee from the little gas-stove that was all our kitchen. As I kissed her good-bye, I asked her jestingly what new injury I had done her. She answered something under her breath about not being sure yet. She agreed to meet me for lunch down-town, when I should have drawn my salary.

I will say nothing of the new cause of complaint she believed herself to have against me, or how she came by that belief, for it involves a third party. She knows now—she must have known, after reflection—that, with all my faults, I never faltered in my love for her. I do not say she was unreasonable, for when, on meeting, she charged me with it, I did not deny it, but left her to believe it if she would. I can scarcely explain it, even now. The sudden realisation of the wrong I had done her came over me—of how much happier she would be without me and the burden of my disgrace and failure. If I had never shown the depth of my love before, I could do it then, though she could never know it.

She was not angry, outwardly. Her face was set, but it was more with grief than anger. She told me firstly, quite without expression, that she had that morning received the promise of some work for which she had been hoping—some small singing engagement which would take her out of New York. Before I could reply she set out her

charge against me. Her face was averted and her voice full of pain, and when at last she finished and looked at me, I could have sworn—had I not known what cause she had to be tired of me—that she was appealing to me to deny what she had said. I did not. I met her eyes; that and no more. It was better—I knew that it was better for her—even if it destroyed, once and for all, her belief in mankind.

She turned away at last, with a weary shake of her head, poor girl! I can see her now, so very well. She was wearing a big hat, one she had had for a long time and had retrimmed it herself. It was brownish green, and trimmed with intimation vine foliage. For her dress she had somehow adapted an old tea-gown—she was always clever with her hands—that she had bought three years before. You need no stronger testimony to the depth of poverty to which I had brought her.

"I never thought the day would come," she said, "that I should pray I might never see your face again."

She turned away and walked slowly up Sixth Avenue.

I stood upon the corner looking after her until the glimmer of her dress was lost in the crowd. I did not attempt to follow her. I never loved her before with half the blind, passionate devotion I had for her then, but I made no motion to stop her. Perhaps that will be held as some little point in my favour when my time comes.

It was by the merest luck, good or bad, that the policeman stopped me from walking under a street-car. I knew nothing of where I was or where I

was going, only my eyes kept imprinting pictures, little round pictures, on my brain, like coloured photographs. They have remained with me ever since, and come back to me at night, when I am wakeful.

When I came to myself I had walked a long way. I was almost at the end of Fifth Avenue, near Washington Square. My mind began to wander again after that, and in the end I found myself on Broadway, at City Hall Park. It was as though my mind had been frozen. I do not know how long I sat on one of the benches, without once moving away. I know a night had passed, because there was some civic celebration going on at the time—I do not know of what nature and they had—decorated the trees with coloured Japanese lanterns, and their brightness somehow soothed me.

My first conscious act was to feel in my pockets, where I found three dollars and some cents. The first conscious effort of my mind was to remember that, a few days before, I had borrowed five dollars from my darling, on the pretence that I would repay it out of my salary, though really counting upon a remittance from Ivo, from whom I had not then heard. I knew how little she had, and I felt that I must make restitution, as far as it was possible.

I got an envelope at a little shop in Pearl Street, where I wandered without any reason that I know of. I wrote her name on it, put the three bills on it, and set out for Eighteenth Street. I had no second thought in this. I did not expect or even desire to see her, so absolute was my sense of finality. I only felt vaguely that she was already

thinking as badly of me as she could bear to feel, and that I must not add to her burden the belief that I was mean enough to rob her of five dollars.

She had left the house already. She had paid the bill; she must have pawned the rest of her things to do it. Nothing of hers was left. My own things she had neatly packed, saying that I should be calling for them. One of the eye-pictures that always remains with me is of the deserted room, with my things neatly packed waiting for me on the floor.

I suppose I said something to the woman of the house; I don't know what. I was certainly out of my senses for the time. I went into a café at the corner of the street and ordered a bottle of champagne. It cost exactly the three dollars, and I remember very well its horrible sickly taste. I shared it with other two men who were in the bar. I asked them to drink a toast: "Here's to them that's awa'. They probably saw that I was a lunatic, but they drank the toast and then hurried away, looking at me queerly.

I do not know what happened to me during the next three days. When I try to remember them, it is like trying to look through a pall of black velvet. The fourth day must have been Sunday, because I happened to pass Trinity Church when a service was just beginning. I believe I had been sleeping on the Battery Park, watching the steamboats starting for Glen Island in the daytime, because my dear girl and I had sometimes taken them from there. I am surprised they let me into the church at all—I was so dirty and unkempt and

unshaven. I had eaten nothing since the moment I parted from her ; I did not even feel the need of food. The verger gave me a seat in a pew by myself, some distance from the rest of the congregation, which was only small.

I think I had gone in first in the hope of companionship, for I was very lonely. Then, when the service started, I suddenly realised—it was the first time that I had attended a church in America—that the service was the same that I had heard so often as a little boy at home—and so seldom since. By the time the clergyman reached “And hath given power and commandment unto His ministers,” I was sobbing like a frightened child, and nearly choking myself with the effort at self-control. I really was a frightened child at that moment—frightened out of my life by the thought that I was absolutely alone, that there was no one left who cared whether I was alive or damned. Even “to absolve all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe” could not comfort me ; I knew that I did not believe, and I was not at all sure that I truly repented.

Remembering it now, in the light of sanity, I cannot be sure of what I felt then. I only wish I could. I believe my greatest preoccupation was whether it would be better policy to try to make terms with Providence or to give in there and then. I do not know what I decided, but I do know that I suddenly began to pray, to the Divinity I did not believe in, as fervently as the sternest Inquisitor could have desired. Even as I prayed I thought what a cad I was, and wondered whether He would think so too, or whether He would understand. I knew that I was only appealing to

Him as a sort of thirteenth chance, and that if I ever again resumed control over myself, I should slip back into my old carelessness—agnosticism I used to call it, for love of a long word. Yet all the time I found a certain comfort in the thought that if He was really God he must understand.

My prayers were, of course, the absurdest mass of contradictions, that she might come back to me, and that I might have the strength not to go back to her ; that I might live to be a better man, and that I might die before I came to a worse end ; that He would accept my promise of a life-long repentance, and that He would understand that I should certainly backslide if He helped, and so on and so forth. I have backslidden of course ; I do not think I have ever entered a church-door since that day ; at least I shall never sneer at the Christian religion again.

I cannot profess to explain the psychology of it, but I believe those prayers saved me from insanity. I was certainly on the verge of it before ; my brain worked quite normally afterwards. I even began consider how to avoid starvation, to which I had not until then given a thought.

The next three days went pretty badly with me. I do not believe that ever a sickly lamb lost in a Highland snowstorm had less idea of caring for itself than I had. I was actually kept alive by a cup of coffee and a pretzel stood me by a street-walker as starving as myself on the Sunday night ; it never entered my head to refuse her, so low was I fallen. A little girl, crossing Union Square with her mother, ran back and gave me a dime the next afternoon ; I don't know why, for I had not asked

for it. I spent it on cigarettes ; I did not feel I could eat anything.

I fully expected that the next day would see the end of me. I knew how the beggar and the starving loafer feel about things by that time. It struck me as curious that the respectable folk who pass you are always ashamed to look at you. They never do ; either they drop their eyes to the ground or they stare hard at something else. I am not sure that this loneliness, this feeling that you are regarded as a leper, outside the pale of human sympathy, something to be avoided, overlooked, is not the worst of all that a starving man has to bear. Now that things have gone better with me, I never pass a man in rags without looking at him, and, if the chance offers, speaking to him. I know what it means to him.

By the Thursday, which broke grey and bleak over the housetops of Union Square, I was so far gone that I only felt a sort of gentle surprise that starvation was so painless a method of extinction. It began to rain about mid-day, and by the time it penetrated the leaves of the tree under which I was sitting I got up and shuffled away across the Square. I don't know where I thought I was going—nowhere in particular, I expect. Just as I reached the curb on the east side of the square, I saw a man leaning over the bonnet of a red automobile. I felt no shadow of interest or curiosity, but I stopped to watch him ; it meant some kind of bridge with life. He was cursing below his breath, and tapping vaguely with a spanner at things in general. Something—probably my brain was kicking against the feeling of faintness—put it into my head to say,



"Can't I hold your horse, sir?" I certainly did not say it with the idea of being funny, or with any idea at all that I know of.

He was a big fellow, as big as myself, wearing a brown motor-coat. When he looked up, I saw that his hair was grizzled under his cap, and that he wore a grey imperial. He had kind eyes—I have never seen kinder. I remember wondering if he was a Frenchman.

After a bit he gave up whatever he was trying to do, swore again, and stretched himself.

"No good," he said to me. "Nothing for it but to phone the garage."

It did me a surprising amount of good to be spoken to as if I was a human being. I found myself smiling. It came into my head to ask if I couldn't do anything. I told him I knew something about motors. He raised his eyebrows, but he didn't offer any objection. I seemed to put it right by instinct; even before I knew what it was.

He watched me in silence until I had finished, and I saw his hand go to his waistcoat pocket. I somehow felt I would rather die than accept his money, after he had spoken to me as an equal. I just turned and shuffled away. He was already getting into his seat, and had his hand on the starting-lever as I turned away; but before I had gone five steps, I felt his hand on my shoulder. I tried to shake it off, so that he shouldn't see my face, but he twisted me round as if I had been a baby. "What's the matter, son?" he asked me kindly. I mumbled something under my breath and tried to turn away again. I heard him ask me something—if I was up against it, I think it was—and then I suppose I fainted.

When I came to myself, I was in a drug store, with something that smelt unpleasant being held to my nose. The big man was bending over me, and he seemed to be swearing. When I had come to myself and was getting ready to shuffle off, he asked me to come and have lunch with him at the club. It was a good way of bringing me to myself. I motioned towards my clothes as a sufficient apology for refusing. He didn't accept the apology; just took possession of me as if I had been a baby. He steered me into the car, and drove straight away up Fourth Avenue at about a hundred miles an hour. He is one of the worst drivers in New York—though it annoys him to be told so—and we had two breakdowns on the way; but in the end, by a series of miracles, we reached Butcher's Baths, on Sixth Avenue, and I had a bath and a shave and a clean shirt and collar. After that he brought me here—to the very place where I am writing this as proprietor—though it wasn't called Bull's in those days.

He knew all about me before we had finished that lunch; it just spouted out of me at the first word of sympathy. I didn't conceal anything from him either—about what a shirker and a slacker I had been. I even told him my name—without touching on my domestic affairs.

The end of it all was that I am here. His name was Ticehurst, and he first made me understand what the Americans mean when they talk about a white man. I am not by any means the first person he has helped in the same way, though he told me it was because I was English. He said he was a near-Englishman himself, that his grandfather came

from Ledbury, in Herefordshire, and that his family had farmed the same land there for eight centuries. But the fact that he gave me a first leg-up was the least of it; anybody can do that. He understood. I distinguished myself a week afterwards by getting blind drunk in his apartment on 79th Street. He didn't fire me, as I should certainly have done under similar circumstances. His method was to ignore the whole thing and never mention it to me afterwards—and I have never touched drink, or wanted to, since that day. The very first dollar I had, I spent—I was quite mad at the time—in going off to Port Theodore, in Long Island, where my darling and I had been the preceding summer, and mooning about the places we had been to together. I suppose he had put one of his clerks on to follow me; I only know that he turned up there the next day, motor-car and all, and came to me where I was lying on a big rock on the beach, at a place called Rattan Shores, about a mile from the village. We had bathed there together, she and I in spite of the huge notices of "Beware of the Dog," and "Trespassers will be Hanged, Drawn, and Quartered," which is the pleasant little custom of the Long Island landholders to put up to scare would-be bathers. I think my idea was that when the tide rose, it would cover the top of the rock and sweep me away into the Never-Never country. However it was, Ticehurst got there first and carried me back to New York in the auto willy-nilly, and never referred to the subject again. If any insular ass of the kind I used to be ever sneers at the Americans, since then I always contradict him gently to start with, and, if that isn't enough, I

kick him. There are lots of people, at home and abroad, ready to help a lame dog over a stile—if he is a nice dog, and a clean dog, and a grateful dog, that does you credit; but if he is none of those things, and snarls at you—it takes a Ticehurst to go on helping him then, and to behave as if it was an honour and a pleasure to do it. And Ticehurst is what I used to call a Yankee. He is from the Middle West too, where “you have to tell them.” When I die, I am going to leave money for a statue to be put up in Saint Louis—of a lame dog being helped over a stile.

We talked over what I was fit for, more than once—and it did not seem as if there was anything. Ticehurst always wanted to know if there was nothing I had ever felt specially interested in, and I had to admit that the only thing I had ever shown any talent for was cooking, and that only when I was a boy at school, and invented a new way of toasting sardines over the gas. I said it jestingly, but he took it quite seriously, and the next thing that happened was that he found me a place with old Leroux, who used to run this place at the time.

It was an inspiration, as it turned out. I believe there is nothing else in the world I should have been any good at, but I was a good waiter. Even old Leroux, who used to be at the Armenonville in the Bois before he came over here, admitted that. He died six months later, and I saw possibilities in the place, and drew out a scheme for running it and put it before Ticehurst. He is a typical American in that way—ready to risk money on anything. He has been a millionaire twice and a pauper once since

I have known him. He advanced me the necessary money to rearrange the place according to my own ideas. I was able to clear it off under the year, and since then I have had nothing but good fortune.

I have recalled all these very painful memories, because I wish Ivo to know how things have been with me, and I do not care to talk about it even to him. I see much in him that reminds me of myself. I wish above all things to prevent his plunging into marriage until he can be sure of being able to support his wife and not run the risk of being supported by her. I do not know how far things have gone between him and Miss Hertzenstein—it is, of course, impossible to put any credit in the press statements of the affair. I shall certainly do everything in my power to prevent any such a match; he had far better endure any unhappiness than that. To depend upon his wife for his livelihood brings a man down lower than the beasts. I know, for I may hope that I have won back the right to my self-respect again, I have always the memory of that hideous year. I shall always have it. I have never seen her again; knowing that she is well and prosperous, I have no right. Once or twice recently I have been sorely tempted to meet her, professedly by accident, but I have found strength to avoid it. She could never understand; even if she realised the change in me, the memory of what I was would always rise up between us and part us. I gather from Ivo that she half-believes me dead; I shall do all that is in my power to convince her, through him, that it is so. If I never worry her again in this world, perhaps she will

understand in the next. But oh, my dear, my dear, if only it were possible to blot out the past !

## PART VII

### IVO'S NARRATIVE CONTINUED

#### CHAPTER XXIII

BASIL finds peace, perfect peace, in getting up about three in the morning. I don't. He came round and woke me about a week before I had got to sleep to tell me that he had decided to overlook my impertinence—or some rot of that kind. I told him to go to Dublin and inquire about the Crown Jewels ; but he insisted that I was to get up, pack my traps, pay my bill, and come off with him at once to Bull's—and as there seemed no other way of getting rid of him, I did. We got there before eight—if you can imagine anything so unchristian.

There was a curious sort of ceremony to go through when we got there, which made me more certain than before that Basil was somebody I had never been introduced to. Bull's was originally an ordinary dwelling-house, with a backyard to it. In rebuilding it he had thrown out a big dining-room over what used to be the yard. That, of course, was got up in the most expensive kind of Old English simplicity. The space underneath it was also a dining-room, but arranged more after the fashion of the refectory at Harrowby, as cheap and

simple as no matter. When we entered, it was crowded with about the smelliest crowd I ever remember to have passed within ten miles of. There must have been a hundred of them, all sitting along wooden tables, pegging away at their food—and jolly good it looked—like three o'clock in the morning. I remembered then—I hadn't taken much notice of it at the time—that as we walked to the Waldorf overnight, Basil had kept on turning off to speak to all the down-and-outers we passed on the way. I began to wonder if he wasn't one of the dear old Cloud's pals—president of the Pink-and-White Hand Murderer's Association or something.

Basil took a seat by the door, and as each unwashed finished his troughful and started to leave, he got up and spoke to him, and with most of them I saw that he took down something in a notebook, and handed the man a dollar bill.

He was not half through with them, when one of the waiters, looking incredibly dissipated, for he had not shaved or washed his face although he was wearing a dress shirt and green braize apron, came in with a tadpolly-looking young man behind him about four foot high, with a little round porkpie hat and gold spectacles. I was standing some little way from Basil at the moment, and I couldn't hear their first few words. After a bit he turned round towards me, and raised his finger, "Oh, Tupper!" he called out.

It gave me confidence to know who I was, so I went up smiling.

"This is my old friend, Mr. Einstamm, of the *Patriot*," said Basil.



"Glad to know you, sir," said Mr. Einstamm, so I said, "Glad to know you, sir," too, and we shook hands warmly, and asked each other to look in whenever we were passing.

"Say, Tupper," went on Basil, when we had finished, "Mr. Einstamm wants to know if we have any British aristocrats among our staff."

I pointed to the little waiter in the green baize apron, who was yawning like the Red Sea at the time. "He is the only one left," I said, "since the earl became a vegetarian and the Marquis shot himself through not getting his fair share of tips. He is only a Nova Scotian baronet at that."

Mr. Einstamm began writing busily in his notebook, and Basil frowned at me.

"A man called Talbot he is after," he explained. "Come over recently from London. Wants to marry Hertenstein's daughter, the copper king."

"O-h-h," I said, having got my cue, "he must mean the red-haired blighter with the single eyeglass. Turned up yesterday while you were out."

I saw Mr. Einstamm's ears prick up, and he stuck his pencil behind one of them and pulled out another.

"Offered to come in as manager," I went on. "Said, 'Ah—don't you know—ah—give the place some tone—ah—don't you know.' He had left all his aitches behind him in London."

"Sounds as if it might be him," said Basil judiciously. Mr. Einstamm only nodded, and took out a third pencil. I began to understand why his ears were so big.

"I turned him down," I said. "Told him to try—but perhaps I had better not say where. Told

## IVO'S NARRATIVE CONTINUED 261

him that if we engaged him, his job would be to clear away the slopes, and he fainted twice."

I was kept busy the rest of the morning telling other reporters all about it. Very good fellows they were too, and made quite a pretty romance out of it. One of them even succeeded in running the mysterious aristocrat down at one of the big hotels up Central Park way. Had a column interview with him that same afternoon, with exact descriptions of his red hair and his monocle and his aitches all complete.

So we were rid of him. It didn't do the business any harm either ; we had quite a rush of customers for the next day or two wanting to be waited on by the Nova Scotia baronet and for Mr. Tupper to tell them about the earl and the marquis.

Meanwhile I found out that Basil's free breakfast parties were daily institutions. Whenever he passed a poor devil who looked down on his luck—and the dirtier the better—he used to give him a regular invitation card, begging the honour of his company and all the rest of it. When they had fed, he used to have a chat with each of them, find out what was wrong, and afterwards try to put them in the way of getting a job again. He didn't seem to care much for the honest poor ; they could always find some one to help them, according to him. It was the poor devil with as little character as cash that he really sympathised with. I suppose we must have had more black-hearted villainy, male and female, under our roof in the course of a week than the Tombs has in a year, only ours was the kind that didn't specialise.

The truth was that dear old Basil had turned into

something perilously like a crank. He was especially strong on self-respect; if his protégés could only get that back, he made out, the state of their stomach or their morals didn't matter. His crankiness showed itself in a dozen ways. He used to be one of the most original and flowery liars in the Home countries, with a command of detail that would have turned a politician green with envy. Now that he had become Mr. Bull, even a white lie looked blood-red to him. My pleasant little accounts of our aristocrats really upset him as though he had been an old lady teaching a Sunday-school class. I noticed that he didn't object to the extra custom they brought along though. I found myself a bit worried about what Inez would think of him when I had brought them together again—whether, I mean, she wouldn't find the Sunday-school superintendent almost as wearing as she used to find the pub-crawler.

I believe Ticehurst was really at the bottom of it all, though there was nothing of the crank about him. I don't yet know exactly how he makes his living, except that he seems to have a genius for inventing things that no one could possibly want, such as skirt-suspenders for the use of principal boys in pantomime, or machines for embroidering pink roses on men's silk hats, and then selling them for huge sums and immediately losing it all in starting newspapers or coal mines or flour mills. He was a jolly good sort, and I got on with him no end well, although I was a bit jealous of his influence over Basil. The only fault I had to find in him was that he thought himself a humorist, and was always telling stories that he must have

found in the "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle" or "Piers Plowman," and looking sad and depressed if you didn't laugh for more than five minutes on end. He used to say that the English have no sense of humour.

I hadn't been at Bull's forty-eight hours when things began to happen. The very first day Basil gave me no end of a long screed that he had written about his past adventures—for my guidance, he explained, which struck me as rather gratuitous. He made me promise that no one but myself should ever see it; so as soon as I had read it I posted it off at once to Inez, with a letter of my own explaining things a bit—and then sat down to await events.

The second day we were lunching with Ticehurst, in the little private room upstairs. We always lunched there. Ticehurst, who nearly always came in, refused to feed in the public part of the place, because he said that the unmanly, un-American subservience that Basil always insisted on from the waiters took away his appetite. So we fed upstairs and helped ourselves.

I was half-worried out of my life by that time wondering what would be the best thing to do about Estelle. I hadn't heard a word from her—though I had vaguely hoped she might write; I couldn't even feel exactly sure where she was. I kept on making up my mind to tell Basil all about it, and then unmaking it again, lest he should treat it as being ridiculous. With all that on my mind, and Ticehurst making jokes that would have been too mouldy even to feed to the animals in the Ark, I was a pretty gloomy fraction of that lunch party.

We were just about finished when one of the waiters came up in a pretty obvious fluster and began whispering in Basil's ear. He looked a bit surprised, and then he turned round to me, and said, "There is an old gentleman downstairs who says he is looking for a man named Talboys." He turned round to the waiter again. "You told him you did not know the name?"

"The gentleman says he will wait there till he sees him, because he knows he is somewhere in hiding, sir. We have all done our best to reason with him, but he is a very fierce old gentleman, with a large stick, and Mr. Belcher thought that perhaps you wouldn't mind speaking to him."

Basil looked a question to me, and when I didn't say anything, he just shrugged his shoulders and told the man that he would come down.

"I shouldn't wonder if it was old Moresby," I said. "On the boat, you know. I told you about him."

"Doesn't sound as if he was over and above pleased with you," said Basil. "You didn't happen to pick his pocket, or anything?"

That pulled me up all standing. It hadn't occurred to me that he might think—not knowing the real facts—that I had treated Estelle badly. I began to wish I had taken Basil into my confidence.

"Not that I can remember," I said. "But perhaps it might be better if you were to see him first and find out what he wants."

I went after him myself as far as the next landing, and bent over it, listening. It was old Moresby all right. I knew his voice at once. I heard it coming out into the lobby after Basil. He was saying

something about wanting to chastise a paltry scoundrel and not going away until he had.

There is nothing I dislike so much as quarrelling with old gentlemen. I retreated up the stairs as I heard the voice coming nearer, until I was driven back into the room where Ticehurst was still sitting.

"What's the matter?" he said, as soon as he saw my face.

"Death and desolation is the matter," I told him. "Flames and fury are the matter. For the Lord's sake show me somewhere where I can hide?"

He goggled at me for a moment, and then showed me a door, leading into another room. Just as I fled through it, I heard Basil come in, followed by the angry voice.

"He is not in at present," Basil was saying soothingly. "I don't know exactly where he is at this moment. But if you will leave a message, I will see that it reaches him."

"I believe you are hiding him," shouted the old gentleman, and however it was with his heart, I would take my oath his lungs were as sound as a bell. "I refuse to be played with in this way."

Basil said something in a low voice that I could not catch, and just at that moment I heard the voice of another waiter saying that a gentleman downstairs wished particularly to see Mr. Talboys.

I began to wonder whether I was quite right in my head, and I gathered from Basil's voice that he was feeling rather the same way himself. "Oh, ask him up," he said—"Ask them all up. This is Liberty Hall."

There was a moment's silence—I expect Mr. Moresby was getting his breath back. I took the

opportunity to look round the room I was in. It was a dusty sort of place, a sort of lumber-room, and I was delighted to find that it had another door all to itself. I prospected cautiously, and found that it opened on to the same landing, a bit farther along. I felt better when I saw that my retreat wasn't altogether cut off.

When I got back to my post by the inner door, a new voice had butted in. It was American, and I couldn't place it at first, but, by peeping through the crack of the door, I could see that it was Hapgood, the man who had lent me the horse. What he wanted was more than I could imagine. He was just as insistent as the old gentleman, only less truculent.

A bright idea struck me. I tore a scrap of paper off a pile of bill-heads that was lying around promiscuously, and scribbled on it with a pencil I had in my pocket. I was rather too excited to worry about the exact sense of it. "A" I wrote, "is the grandfather of A, one of the girls I think I am engaged to. B is engaged to Miss Hertenstein, or I think he is, and she thinks I am engaged to her. I want to marry A, not B, on any account. For God's sake arrange it for me without bloodshed! Remember, A, not B."

When I had done it, I half opened my door and angled out of it until a chambermaid sort of person came along. I seized hold of her as if she was a Yukon gold-mine. "If you value your own reputation," I told her earnestly, "and the lives of all your aunts, take this note into Bas—I mean Mr. Bull. He is in the next room—that way, idiot. And don't on any account say how you came by it. Just

give it him without saying anything—and then come away.”

She trembled a good deal, but she took the paper—to get rid of me I expect. What is more, she did what I wanted, as I heard by the time I got back to my crack. They were all too busy already to worry much about her. The old gentleman was protesting that he would not be put off with waiters and underlings. He was in a fine old paddy, and after a bit he began to comment on the whole of the Talboys family, and how they appeared in the eyes of ordinary human beings. I was glad when he came to that, because I could hear Basil stiffen—hear his shirt-front, perhaps I ought to say. Then he came out with quite a new sort of voice. “Perhaps I had better say that I am the head of the family that has annoyed you.”

I could hear the General's eyeballs crackle as they flamed round Basil's whiskers.

“You—Lord Talboys!” I heard him gasp, and Basil reply in his best Byzantine manner, “I have that honour.”

Hapgood chimed in just as the General got started again. His trouble was that I had trifled with Miss Hertenstein's affections, and he wanted to know what I was going to do about it. The General's was that I had trifled with his granddaughter's affections, and he jolly well knew what he was going to do about it. They both talked at once, but as they were saying very much the same things, it didn't confuse the issues much.

I somehow felt that Basil must be beginning to get steam up. “Do I not understand, Mr. Hapgood,” he began, in his best voice, “that you are



yourself a candidate for Miss Hertenstein's hand?"

"That is not in question," countered the lawyer. "I am not going to stand by and see her made unhappy."

"B. Yes, of course, you must be B," I heard Basil mutter quite distinctly. It looked as if he was getting muddled. "Even if—how shall I put it—that implies the—er—extinction of your hopes."

"If she wants the fellow, have him she shall, if I have to drag him to the altar by the skin of his eyeballs. I want to know how he stands."

I already thought Hapgood rather a descent chap, and I went on thinking so, though I did wish he wasn't so deucedly altruistic. I mentally made over to him all my share in Miss Elvira's affections, and was only sorry it would have looked intrusive for me to put my head in and tell him so.

He had scarcely finished speaking, when the flooring creaked loudly and a voice like the by-product of a vulcano boomed out. "I have a sort of impression that I can look after my daughter's interests without your help," it said.

It was Hertenstein of course, and it gave me the comfortable feeling that the party was complete at last, especially as he was about nine foot high and the room very small.

"I should like a few words with the Honourable Ivo Talboys," I heard him boom on. "They told me I should find him here."

I got the impression that Basil was losing grip with the situation. "Would you mind telling me—" he began. "I am not quite clear whether you represent A or B. Are you this gentleman's son—

or son-in-law—or that gentleman's father or father-in-law? Or perhaps both? ”

They all began to explain things at once. I didn't listen to them, because I was getting to feel happier again. Hertenstein and Hapgood more or less neutralised each other so far as Miss Hertenstein was concerned, and if the General insisted on marrying me by force, I should just have to put up with it. It struck me suddenly that I was occupying rather an undignified position, having my affairs talked over in that way, especially if one of them should open the door. I have always liked taking a stroll after lunch, and the weather was wonderfully warm for the time of year.

I got down the stairs all right. To get at the waiters' dressing room I had to go through the restaurant—and I didn't care for the idea of strolling out in evening dress, I walked through to change. I picked up a pile of dirty plates on the way, and carried them along as a sort of disguise, in case any more stern parents should be waiting to interview me. When I got level with the last table in the room I dropped them. Estelle and Miss Hertenstein were lunching their together, and they had both seen me.

## CHAPTER XXIV

I MIGHT easily have hurt myself, tumbling over a lot of broken crockery, but it seemed to amuse them both no end. They both sat there and laughed like two of the Graces who had just seen the third one drop a lock of false hair. I stood and looked at them with all the pathetic dignity I could rally round me, which wasn't much.

"We thought we might see you," said Miss Elvira, when they had recovered. "We came here on purpose."

"They won't be long now," I assured them. "They must just about have killed my brother by now."

"They? Who do you mean?" They seemed surprised about something.

"The Désentente Cordiale," I told them. I was proud of it; I wasn't quite sure what the words meant—I had picked them up out of a newspaper, but they expressed an idea all right. "The General had him by the throat when I left; Mr. Hertenstein had just put his scalp away in his pocket-book for reference, and Mr. Hapgood was gnawing his ankle. I am just off to fetch the undertaker."

"Do you mean they are here already? What fools men are," said Miss Hertenstein amiably. Estelle said something about having been afraid of

it, and then they both said it was an impossible situation.

I told them I quite agreed with them, and if they would excuse me, I would run downstairs and change into a suit of mourning.

Miss Hertenstein suddenly turned her nose up ; one of the neatest things I ever saw. "If you represent the British standard of the ardent lover," she said, "give me Amurrica every time."

I explained to her that in England we never make love in public restaurants, except *à-tête-à-tête*.

She is uncommonly pretty, but I don't know that I altogether envy Hapgood. I believe she would have kept me stewing there for a week, just for the pleasure of tormenting me. Estelle isn't like that. She suddenly leant out towards me, "It was all a mistake," she said ; "I want to ask you to forgive me."

I was going pink all over with happiness, like a beetroot that had got into too hot a bath by mistake, when Miss Elvira chimed in. She just flew at Estelle, told her she was a weak fool, and not worthy of her feminine sex or her American training, and that I had domineering man written all over me plainly enough without her pandering to it. They had quite a cheerful little scrap about it, while I stood by wondering what to do with my hands now I had no plates to toy with. Then they made me sit down at the table with them, to the scandal of the other waiters. I believe Basil would have had a fit if he had seen me, but Miss Hertenstein said if I didn't it would show I was not worthy of being engaged to two of the prettiest women in America, so there was no way out of it.

There had been all sorts of alarums and excursions going on. Before Estelle got halfway home, Hapgood came spurring after her, chestnut mare and all, like a demon horseman, as she put it. He was as muddled about things as she was herself, because only that morning Miss Hertenstein had accepted him, and later in the day she had a regular pitched battle with her father, in his presence, because he objected to her being engaged to me. When Hapgood groused about it, which wasn't very surprising, she told him it was her inalienable right to be engaged to as many people as she liked, so long as she only married one of them, and if he didn't like it he could lump it, or words to that effect. I believe he had been letting off his feelings before then, by calling up the newspaper offices on the long-distance 'phone and explaining that Miss Hertenstein had refused me. If he hadn't, I don't know who had, because neither the father nor the daughter knew anything about it—hadn't been interviewed or anything.

Hapgood and Estelle had a regular pow-wow about things after she had put the old gentleman to bed that evening. When he had gone, as she was feeling a bit shaken up over my perfidy, she happened to turn over the wallet I had left with her, and when she came upon the sealed envelope from Inez, she opened it to see if it threw any light upon things. It wasn't exactly what I should have cared to do myself—though I took jolly good care not to say so; but it turned out all right, because what she read there explained things to her satisfaction. It didn't to the General's though. He preferred to go on regarding me as an irreclaimable blackguard.

That morning, just when she was about starting for New York to look for me, Miss Hertzenstein turned up in her auto to ask if she had heard anything of Hapgood, because he had gone off vowing to shoot me and blow his own brains out. She was pleasantly excited over the prospect. She had an idea her father meant to horsewhip me whenever he could find time, and that struck her as amusing. Estelle hasn't got so keen a sense of humour, and there must have been another exciting ten minutes before they decided to kiss and make friends. By that time they found the General had sneaked off by himself, leaving a note to say that if Estelle lacked spirit to avenge the insult offered to her, he didn't, and that he was off to New York to chastise an impertinent scoundrel. So, all things considered, they thought they had better come along at once so as not to miss any fun that happened to be going. As everything seemed quiet, and they couldn't hear of any murders having taken place, they thought they might as well lunch—rather cold-blooded, it struck me—while they were waiting for something to turn up.

Although Miss Hertzenstein maintained that she had been perfectly right to punish me for the way I had treated her, Estelle thought I had behaved like a hero of romance, which struck me as a much more sensible view to take. Anyway, it had turned out all right, and I wouldn't have called the President my cousin, even if he had happened to be.

I was quite happy and ready to stay there as long as either of them liked, though I did have some faint hopes that Miss Hertzenstein might remember she had another engagement somewhere. But after

about three seconds they both got up, and said that, as I was more or less engaged to both of them, I should have the privilege of paying both their bills for them, and that then we should all go upstairs and join the family circle.

I explained that Basil never allowed any one to enter his private room who wasn't specially invited, and that we might intrude upon private business discussions, or even something that wasn't fit for ladies' ears; but that only seemed to make them more eager, and, as soon as we were outside the restaurant, they came one on each side of me and took my arms and ran me up the stairs and burst open the door of the private room without so much as knocking.

Things had settled down quite a lot since I left. They had a magnum of champagne on the table, and they were all smoking big cigars, so that you could scarcely see them. Mr. Hertzstein had his feet on the table, and Mr. Hapgood had his coat off and his feet on the mantelpiece, and Ticehurst was telling them one of the stories that delayed the Angels from getting to the Garden in time to warn Eve against the Serpent.

They all got up when I came in, as if I had been royalty. The General reached for his walking-stick, and Hapgood began to roll up his shirt-sleeves as if he wanted to show his muscle, and Mr. Hertzstein opened his mouth to be in readiness to let out a few remarks by the time they had climbed up to it from his lungs. None of them did or said anything, though, because Miss Hertzstein spoke first. "You are a lot of very foolish people," she said, "and if a single one of you isn't real sweet

## IVO'S NARRATIVE CONTINUED 275

to him, I will never speak another word to Earl Hapgood."

Earl Hapgood—it wasn't a title, I found out later, but a given-name, as they call it here—hurried towards me and wrung my hand and patted me on the shoulder. I believe he would have hugged me if he hadn't been afraid Estelle might be jealous. That gave us the majority, so there was no more question of hostilities.

"Estelle here is going to marry Ivo Talboys and I am going to marry Earl Hapgood," she went on. If any one had any objections to make, they were now to declare them, because they didn't make the least difference, and it would be just as well to get them out of the way at once.

Nobody seemed to object much, except the General. I have an impression that Mr. Hertzstein felt a bit out of it, but, being American, he was too well trained to say anything. As to the General, Miss Hertzstein bottled him up very neatly by kissing him on the tip of his nose—she went for his lips, I think, but steered badly—and after that he was too busy curling the ends of his moustache and shooting his cuffs to think of anything else.

We had quite a pleasant chatty afternoon after that, ending up with a tour of inspection over the premises and a battle-royal between Miss Hertzstein and the head cook over the best way to make Yorkshire pudding. The cook, who was really a Frenchman, only was called Smith so as not to interfere with the local atmosphere, had learnt in Marseilles, and Miss Hertzstein had been taught by an old nigger woman in Florida, and I expect



honours were even. I don't really know, because I was taking Estelle on a personally conducted tour through the furnace-room—which was rather lonely—and by the time we got back they were reconciled and telling the General the secrets of military cooking in the field.

They were all keen on seeing a little more of me as a waiter, but they hadn't any chance that day, and, after a bit, the girls carried me off with them in the Hertzenstein auto to call on the Cloud and make the Williamson girl's acquaintance.

I didn't gather there was anything particular on, except a sort of afternoon call, so I confined myself to doing the honours and introducing the Cloud, who was wearing the Garden of Eden hat—I don't believe she had ever taken it off since she got it—and chasing away the crowd of rubberers that had assembled to see an auto as broad as the Hudson trying to turn round in a street as narrow as the inside of a medium-sized eel.

They were all blooming, especially the baby, who had taken naturally to the rôle of a coal miner, and when we arrived was sitting in a sort of bower it had burrowed out of a heap of charcoal, sucking away at its thumbs so as to be sure of not wasting even a crumb of dirt and blowing it out again in tar-bubbles.

Those sort of ceremonies are always a little wearing, although I did my best to make conversation and let the baby cover me all over with dirt as a hint to Estelle how thoroughly domesticated I was. The General was more of a success than I was, because he had once really dined with Garibaldi, and the whole assembly got really intimate in trying

to drive it into Nonno's head. Even so, I was just going to suggest that we should be late for an important engagement at the White House if we didn't go at once, when I saw the Williamson girl suddenly go red and sit down heavily on the nearest chair. I happened to have my back to the door, which she was looking towards, and when I nipped round, there was Hapgood standing in the doorway, and just behind him our friend Peyton Dayrell the burglar.

He was so well dressed and so sprucely groomed, and so condescendingly aristocratic, and so sublimely unconscious of anything unusual in the circumstances, that I felt quite shabby beside him. I think we all did except the old General, who positively beamed at him, and the two of them discussed the events of the voyage and the state of the crops and the meteorological prospects in a way that was quite a lesson in deportment under difficulties.

They were so absorbed in each other that we left the old gentleman there, Dayrell promising to see him save home. Miss Hertzstein and Hapgood went off in the auto, but Estelle and I walked, because we were not going the same way and we wanted to admire the scenery. She was a little worried at leaving her grandfather surrounded by murderers, but I pointed out to her that, after all, he had spent the greater part of his life in the same way, which comforted her a bit, and we enjoyed our walk quite a lot. Most of the things she told me I told her beforehand, but one or two were original. One was that Dayrell's release was due to Mr. Hertzstein, though his daughter had kept him up

to it. He and Hapgood had decided between them that it would be better not to go into the question whether he was guilty or innocent, because, if he was innocent, he would probably get rather a heavier sentence than if he wasn't. So they had merely inquired what were the prevalent rates for acquittals, with or without a stain on your character ; they were rather high because of the police scandal and the coming Presidential Election. Mr. Hirtzenstein drew a cheque, and Hapgood conveyed it to the proper quarter, and Dayrell was released without a stain on his character, as that only cost a few hundreds more and was more satisfactory in other ways ; and State-Senator West was wailing and gnashing of teeth, and declaring that the country was going to the dogs, and that he would turn Progressive if things didn't improve ; and everybody else was as merry as so many sandboys. I can't guarantee the details, because Estelle wasn't very clear about them herself, and they don't matter much either, as they were strictly according to precedent, but there wasn't any doubt about the main facts.

Dayrell gave a good deal of trouble though before they were finished with him. He was so pleased at the attention his case was receiving, and at the number of reporters who visited him, and the number of offers of marriage that kept pouring in by every post, most of them calling him "my lord," and saying that it had long been the darling wish of the writer's heart to make a British aristocrat truly happy by means of her devoted affection and excellent cooking, that he quite grudged leaving the Tombs or wherever it was. The only way they

managed him at last was by threatening, in a personal interview, that if he didn't do what he was told at once, they would put up a lawyer to plead for him, and point out that he wasn't really a Dayrell, but only a valet named Hobbes and not an aristocrat at all. It was Estelle's idea, and she felt herself it was a little brutal, especially as she only knew of it from the account he had written of himself in a moment of weakness; but it worked like a charm. A wonderful woman Estelle is. She had another idea, quite as practical: to leave the Williamson girl's story lying about his cell by accident, where he couldn't help seeing it, and finding out how she felt about him. It was taking rather a big risk, as I told her, for it might easily have fallen into the hands of one of the reporters who always slept in the cell with him; but it turned out all right, and the first thing he asked, after matters were fixed up and the prison officials came to bid him good-bye and ask him to drop in whenever he was passing, was, if Hapgood knew where the Williamson girl was to be found.

Estelle was so keen on getting everything nicely rounded off, that she wanted to start off there and then for Chicago to collect Inez and reconcile her and Basil, whether they liked it or not. I suggested it might be rather a good idea to wait a day or two in order to see if anything turned up; and it was just as well, as it turned up.

It was exactly a week after I had written to Inez and sent her Basil's maunderings that I happened to get up in time to assist in the free breakfast-table. Basil was a bit late in coming in, and while I was waiting for him I noticed a rather big hat at the

women's table. It was green and trimmed with vine leaves, and so big that I couldn't see the wearer's face, and I don't suppose I should have noticed it at all if I hadn't thought it looked rather less greasy and wispy than its neighbours.

I took my place in Basil's chair and interviewed a few of our scoundrels, and soon afterwards he came in. They were just beginning to trickle out by that time. They were nearly all gone when it occurred to me to think about the green hat again, because I hadn't noticed it go past me. I looked for it, and it was still in its place at the women's table. It was the last there, and there were only three men left at the others. They got up and went just about then, and then I saw it get up from the table, and I caught a glimpse of the face underneath it. I fell upon the last of the three hoboos, who was still lingering speaking to Basil, and chased him out into the passageway, and caught the Nova Scotian baronet by the scruff of the neck in passing and pulled the door to behind me, and stood with my back against it so that nobody could get in. I heard afterwards that I began to sing, though I didn't know it at the time. First of all I sang "John Brown's Body," which I had learned from the buggy-driver at Probityville, and then I sang "A life on the ocean wave," and I ended with Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" without any words to it.

I expect I skipped a little to, because every now and then a bunch of waiters would put their heads round the end of the passage, looking as if they felt they ought to do something, and I had to shoo them away.

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The door opened suddenly behind me while I was in the middle of the "Wedding March." They were both standing there, dear old Basil with his arm round his wife's waist, and they were both looking so happy that upon my soul it was all I could do not to howl.

PART VIII

SIR EDWARD'S NARRATIVE  
CONTINUED

CHAPTER XXV

As my hands penned the first lines of what has developed into this narrative, it is perhaps only right that I should also bring it to a close, ere returning it as a whole to the original wallet, where it may become an heirloom for Estelle's children's children, should they feel sufficient interest in their ancestors' experiences. I have been careful to delete nothing, not even my dear Ivo's atrocious libel on my deportment when Miss Hertzenstein kissed me—a very pleasant memory indeed—in the private room at Bull's restaurant.

I am writing these closing words with the same pen and in the same room in which I penned the first. Old Trix is lying on the hearthrug, worshipping the fire beside me, her faithful ears twitching at my slightest movement; I can hear Handasyde whistling "The Bitish Grenadiers"—an unpleasant trick she picked up from her late husband, and of which I have never been able to break her—over some domestic employment in the

outer hall ; the past three months might almost seem a dream were it not for the sprig of orange blossom that lies on the desk before me and the abominable fragments of confetti that my best efforts have not yet succeeded in removing from my coat.

I am not an authority in weddings, but my friends, including Mrs. Hathorn and Mrs. Witham, assure me that the ceremony in our little parish church was as beautiful, if less elaborate, as any in their experience. Personally I can only testify that one very happy old man nearly disgraced himself in his excitement by persisting for some moments in giving away the bridegroom instead of the bride.

Not one of my old friends was missing from the breakfast which followed the wedding. Even Charley Padstow had his usual seat, though groaning atrociously at intervals, as though he were chief mourner instead of second best man, as Mrs. Hathorn reminded him. He has not yet quite recovered from the accident which befell him three weeks since on the day before our return, when, through missing his footing, he fell from the very apex of the triumphal arch he was supervising. Fortunately his fall was broken by a wagon-load of mangolds which happened to be passing beneath the arch, and he sustained no serious injuries. Unwilling, however, to relinquish his role of martyr to the cause of friendship, he has ever since made the most of his bruises, groaning in the most lamentable manner if so much as a leaf fall within ten yards of him. As the decanters circulated, however, he forgot himself more and more—in both senses of the word—and attempted jests of such doubtful



propriety that dear Frank Cottery's ear-trumpet, directed by Mrs. Hathorn's unfailing discretion, was in almost constant requisition.

My dear children have already started on their wedding journey, but I shall not be lonely in their absence. Lord Talboys and that most charming and dear lady his wife have consented to bear me company for a time, before their return to New York, where, despite all my arguments, they are resolutely determined to settle. I am glad to be able to record that they seem delighted with each other's society, though, with an old man's frankness, I have ventured to hint to my young friend that the adoration with which he regards his wife's every footstep might be more wisely masked. As I discovered in the Consulate of Plancus, very shortly after my own most happy marriage, the better the woman, the more ready is she to accept the role of tyrant when offered for her acceptance.

I am sufficiently old-fashioned to prefer that a story shall be brought to an end before it is finished, and as my unborn descendants cannot very well object, it pleases me to record the fortunes, so far as we have been able to influence them, of those with whom Ivo and myself were brought into contact during the time of our stay in America. And first of all let me record the one fault I have to find with my most dear son, or more strictly grandson, Ivo—I mean his inveterate habit of singing when he is happy. Estelle assures me that he has a melodious voice; I am of another opinion. It was by the merest accident that I was able to stop him, in mid-stream as it were, from informing all and sundry that “John Brown's body lies a-mouldering

in the grave," at the precise moment when he placed the ring upon his bride's finger. I was quite unable to prevent his bursting out into "The Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond" as they drove away after the breakfast, amid an abominable shower of confetti and one old shoe, flung by Charley Padstow with such imperfect aim as to strike my godson Ned Witham full in the face, whence I expect a feud which it will take all my diplomacy to arrange within three years. Ivo infected Carrow, my groom-coachman, hitherto the most reticent and respectful of men, with the same Bacchic frenzy, so that while the master cacophoned from within, the man wailed from the box. Worst of all, my own dear Estelle, instead of checking her husband, was also singing at the top of her voice, in, I am sorry to say, an American accent, and quite ignoring the efforts of the Squirrel Patrol of Boy Scouts who, lined up by the roadside, were giving their favourite call with atrocious energy.

Am I overstepping an old man's privilege of loquacity? Perhaps. But I have seen so much misery in this world, that it is a pleasure to record that the sun still shines over some of us, and that as the French most aptly have it, "*Il y a des honnetes gens partout.*" For the rest I will be brief.

Precisely on the wedding morning, as if timed by a metronome, arrived a coloured photograph from New York, representing the Signora Ferrati in a wonderful costume of pink silk, surmounted by a still more wonderful hat of floral design, and expressing a number of good wishes which, being unacquainted with the Italian language, I am unable to translate. I only know that both Ivo

and Estelle seemed touched by what they read, and that Ivo declared that for the rest of his life the Cloud was lost in the rosy hues of a Florentine sunset, and that Mr. Nonno was, for a lunatic, the wisest man he had ever met. I am glad to add that Lord Talboys—a name which, in spite of everything, I prefer to Mr. Basil F. Bull, that under which he proposes to pass henceforward—has announced his intention of appointing her perveyor-in-ordinary of capers, anchovies, tomatoes, macaroni, and dill pickles to what he calls the “Bull chain of restaurants,” and that at Ivo’s earnest request he has promised that no account she renders shall be checked or in any way supervised. Whence we may, I suppose, take it that the future of the firm of Antonio Ferrati is assured.

I must confess that I did not part on the best of terms with Mr. Edward F. Hertenstein. I have the highest respect for him, and I am ready to admit that he put me right on a point in connection with the battle of Washington Heights, in which I am sorry to believe our troops were defeated for the only time on record in the open field. Nevertheless, I refuse to believe that he or any other man living has any shadow of right to interfere between me and those to whom my family considers itself indebted. If therefore he persists, as he has already insisted, in forwarding a cheque to my friend Dayrell, or Hobbes, towards the ingoings of the Washington Arms, I have arranged that it shall be returned to him with as much contumely as is consistent with the respect in which I hold him. I should perhaps add that his daughter, whom I really believe to be the most beautiful young woman I ever saw in my

life, though Ivo would not agree with me, was married upon the same day, which is to say this morning, as was Estelle, and that the occasion was celebrated by an interchange of cablegrams the cost of which, as Ivo certainly cannot afford it, will, I suppose, in the end come upon me. I am very glad that it is so, let me say at once. Mr. Hapgood struck me—I say it without any suggestion of offence—as the best type of Englishman ; I wish him and his wife all happiness.

I am glad to record that before we left New York we succeeded in finding Mr. Craig, the Irishman with whom Miss Williamson forgathered on the benches of Union Square. Although he is, I gather, very much past his prime, Lord Talboys has found him some altogether unnecessary work in connection with one of his many restaurants, and his son is at present in a sanatorium in Los Angeles, California.

My friend Dayrell, or Hobbes, with some slight assistance from his friends, has become the licensee of the Washington Arms (formerly the Duke of Edinborough) at Mallinge, in my own licensing district. I have no doubt that he will do well there. Fortunately, the holding of a licence is by him included among the occupations of a gentleman as fully as is the practice of the confidence-trick or the command of an army.

In thus fulfilling his gentlemanly destiny he will, I am confident, be ably seconded by his wife. I need not say that they were both present at the wedding, when the baby crowed almost as loudly as Ivo himself. I made it my business to call in at the Washington Arms a day or two since, when, from

what I saw of the vigour—a shade acerbic to masculine eyes—with which she marshalled her barmaids to their duty, it was clearly evident that she has regained that self-respect which Lord Talboys declares, with some authority, to be the most precious of human possessions. She already decidedly bullies her husband : in a very few years I am convinced she will rule him with a rod of iron. I can only say, in that case, God speed her elbow, for if ever woman earned the right to that display of outward authority so dear to the feminine heart, she most assuredly has.

Let me now—the honk-honking of his execrable devil-car warns me that Dick Witham and his wife have arrived to share my evening meal. Let it remind me that, however much I loathe and detest motorists, and all their works, “il y a des honnêtes gens partout.”

THE END





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### Hunt the slipper

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